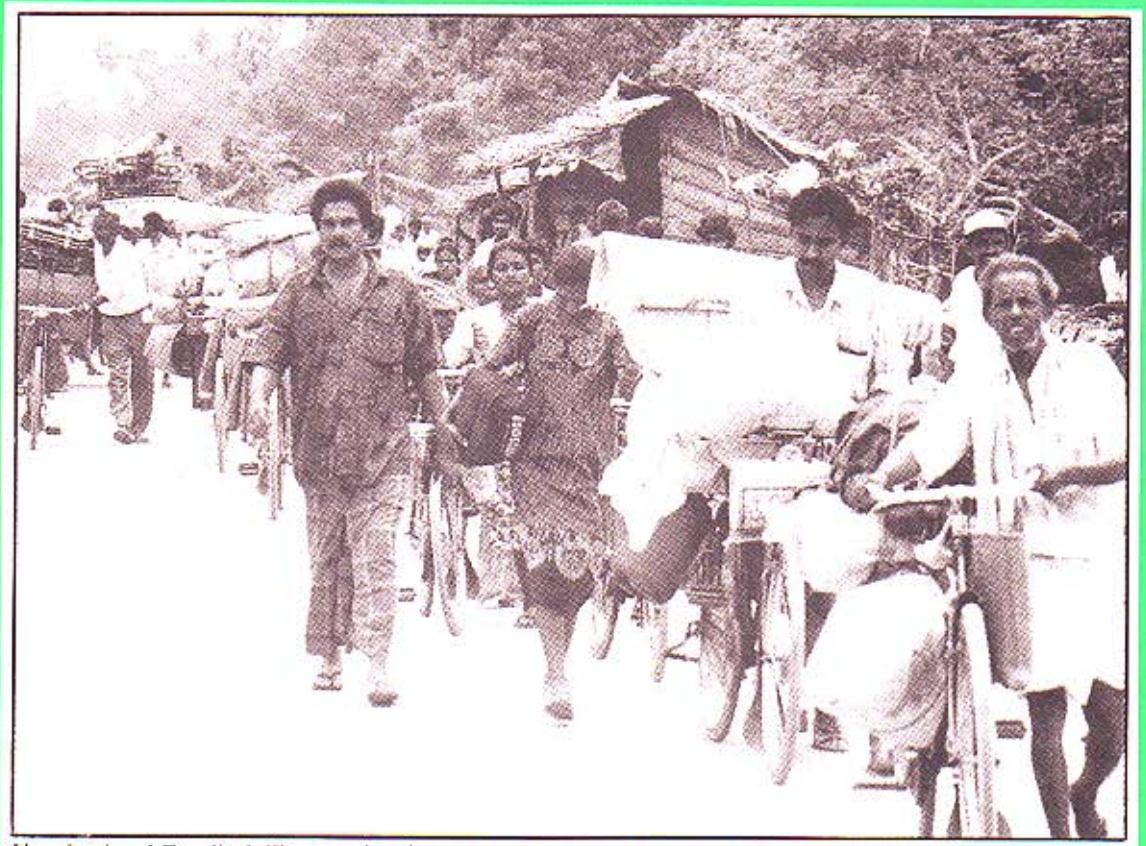
Tamil TIMES

Vol XV No.5 ISSN 0266-4488 15 MAY 1996 90p

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
UK/India/Sri Lanka.....£15/$25
Australia.....Aus$45
Canada.....Can$40
USA $35
All Other Countries £20/US$35

Jaffna Returns to Life



Hundreds of Tamil civilians going home on foot and on bicycles and carts in Jaffna on April 25

★ Journalists visit Jaffna

★ The first step to settlement — recognition of LTTE

★ How JR hounded Mrs B out of politics

★ Jayalalitha humbled

★ Tamil Nadu — The Return of Karunanidhi

★ The way for peace and political solution

★ Election leaves India at the crossroads

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I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.
– Voltaire

Tamil TIMES

ISSN 0266-4488
Vol.XV No.5
15 MAY 1996

Published by

TAMIL TIMES LTD
P.O. BOX 121
SUTTON, SURREY SM1 3TD
UNITED KINGDOM

Phone: 0181-644 0972
Fax: 0181-241 4557

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

UK/India/Sri Lanka ..... £15/US$25
Australia.....Aus$45
(Australian bank cheques only)
Canada.....Can$40
USA ..... US$35
All other countries..... £20/US$35

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Abuse of Power

The crushing defeat and almost total removal of Jayalalitha Jayaram from the landscape of Tamil Nadu politics should be a lesson not to be forgotten by all those who aspire to acquire political power.

By design or by default Jayalalitha inherited the political mantle and legacy of the popular and populist AIADMK leader, the late lamented M.G. Ramachandran who left behind an enormous support base for his party. Aligning with Congress both in the State and at the Centre, she won for the AIADMK an impressive victory in the 1991 elections held in the context of the sympathy wave generated by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and thus became Tamil Nadu's first Chief Minister.

Now she has not only been ousted from power. Jayalalitha lost her own seat along with most of her party candidates. The defeat she brought upon the AIADMK was near total. How and why did the people exact such a heavy political price?

It took little time after Jayalalitha became Chief Minister for most people to realise that here was a woman who went mad with power which irretrievably corrupted her. Though a Chief Minister of a State in India has limited power circumscribed by the Constitution, as time passed Jayalalitha began to behave and conduct herself as if she was an absolute ruler accountable to no one.

Jayalalitha brooked no opposition whether within or outside her party and unleashed her goon squads upon journalists, lawyers and political opponents in her sustained effort to silence them. She abused her position and power in deploying the law and order machinery of the State to intimidate and silence her critics.

Her unrestrained arrogance was on constant display for everyone to see. She demanded and obtained total obedience, and even abject subservience from her party members and Ministers. They prostrated themselves in front of her kissing her feet and the lady never objected. Such was her vanity that she ensured that giant-sized cutouts of her were displayed in prominent public places throughout the State.

She shamelessly indulged in crude and vainglorious extravaganzas, spending billions of rupees of people's money in well publicised demonstrations of her self-importance. the 'mother of all weddings' she conducted for her so-called foster son will go down in the annals of India as the most disgraceful act of self-indulgence.

The gravest indictment against Jayalalitha was that she was a consummate practitioner of corruption and bribery which became her guiding virtues. Never before in Indian politics has a Chief Minister of a State indulged in naked corruption and financial skulduggery of such magnitude. Besides amassing vast fortunes for herself, dipping her dirty hand into the tills of the State's treasury to dispense favours to her kith and kin and party and business associates became her pastime.

The people of Tamil Nadu have thrown her out into the political wilderness where Jayalalitha deservedly belongs. It is to the credit of the democratic process that it affords to the ordinary people the opportunity to turn out those who aspire to and acquire political power and thereafter abuse their power and become unaccountable to the very people who put them there in the first place.

Jaffna Returns to Life

Jaffna, normally a vibrant city with a teaming population, turned into a ghost town emptied of its people following Operation Riviresa 1, is slowly returning to life again with the gradual return of civilians following Operation Riviresa 3.

Government forces advancing on the last Tamil Tiger bastions in northern Sri Lanka on Thursday 16 May reached the port town of Point Pedro, the main Sea Tiger base in the northern Jaffna peninsula, thus successfully completing the effort at bringing the almost the whole of the peninsula under the control of government forces.

The troops, backed by tanks, artillery and air support, launched the offensive at dawn on Wednesday 15 May from defence lines in Kodikamam and moved north to Point Pedro on the nor theastern edge of the peninsula. Military sources claimed that they encountered very little resistance from the Tigers.

Deputy Defence Minister Anurud dha Ratwatte was quoted as saying that not a single civilian was killed in Operation Riviresa 3. "I wonder whether our troops had even to fire 100 shots to finish off Tiger resistance. The Tigers who could not withstand the onslaught of security forces beat a hasty retreat," Ratwatte said. But the LTTE now based on the mainland south of the peninsula, said attacks by the military killed at least 20 Tamil civilians ahead of the capture of the Vadamarachchi area.

The army captured Kodikamam and Chavakachcheri in the Thenmaradchchi division of the peninsula, in a major offensive codenamed Operation Riviresa 2 in mid April claiming to free more than 200,000 Tamil civilians from LTTE control. Following this operation, according to government sources, tens of thousands of people who had fled from the Valigamam division and Jaffna town in the wake of previous Operation Riviresa 1 in October 1995 began to trek back in large numbers.

The Tigers had already withdrawn most of their cadre and military hardware from Jaffna and regrouped in the Kilinochchi and Wanni areas on the mainland taking along with them an estimated 100,000 people from the peninsula.

"Now the government should show its ability to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people, while forging ahead with its peace proposal," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, a political analyst.

Now that the last strip of Jaffna, which has for years been the base and stronghold of the Tigers, has been brought back under government control, and with the return of a large number of Tamil civilians, observers say the 13 year civil war has reached a crucial stage. The government's aim will be to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people with a view to marginalise the LTTE, although both government and military leaders under no illusion that they could militarily defeat the Tigers totally. The LTTE which has regrouped and set up its headquarters and bases in the Kilinochchi and Wanni areas after evacuating from Jaffna last November continue to remain a formidable force with dedicated cadres ready to lay down their lives on their leader's command.

Situation in Jaffna

An independent assessment of the situation in Jaffna came from the Medical Emergency Relief International (Merlin), a Britishregistered charity, which sent in a German surgeon and expert in tropical medicine, Dr Michael Schubert, for a "rapid assessment" at the end April following Operation Riviresa 2.

Schubert confirmed the military's claims that large numbers of Tamil civilians were on the move in Jaffna. He was allowed to travel freely and saw no evidence of high civilian casualties.

"Several I spoke to said they were happy to be going home but a few said they feared the LTTE would put pressure on them," he told the press on his return to Colombo on 2 May. "They said they were allowed to pass without paying the usual money (to the LTTE) but were warned not to speak to the army. They said they feared there would be attacks," he said.

He also said the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, the main medical facility in northern Sri Lanka, had been "to a large extent" destroyed.

Many of the refugees were exhausted, although there was no immediate evidence of malnutrition, and there was "an unknown number" of explosives in the area to which they were returning,

Schubert's report said

The surgeon monitored the movement of refugees from Jaffna town to

Schools reopen in Jaffna as Tamil civilians return in large numbers

northern Palali - 1,200 in half an hour, 1,400 in an hour - later the same day, travelling by bicycle, tractor or on foot and carrying their personal belongings.

"These figures show very clearly that people are returning to their homes in large numbers," the report said. "This was also confirmed by the returnees themselves when many of them mentioned that neighbours or family members would soon follow."

Schubert, with experience in war zones from Africa to the former Soviet republics, was sent to Jaffna to assess the security situation, identify medical needs and gauge capacity of local medical centres.

"The Jaffna Teaching Hospital is to a large extent destroyed," the report said, adding that only the former paediatric unit was functioning as an outpatient department, inpatient department, pharmacy, medical store, dressing room and consultation room.

"In all departments, the medical material has been removed with only very few exceptions," it said. With most diagnostic facilities missing, the army was helping to transport severely ill patients to the giant Palali camp, about an hour's drive away on potholed roads.

There was no running water and the sewage system was not working. The hospital compound had been cleared of explosives. There was no electricity in the day and only a small generator for heating water. At night, an army generator lit up some bulbs in the hospital and some street lights and houses.

In Jaffna town, 60 percent of buildings were in need of repair. "An estimated five percent of all buildings have been severely damaged during the last six months," the report said, adding that explosives posed a risk in some buildings.

Govt's Moves

From the speeches by Deputy Defence Minister, Anuruddha Ratwatte, it is obvious that the government is in an upbeat mood about the military's successes in the Jaffna peninsula. Referring to the return of "more than 200,000 Tamil civilians" to the areas under army control, Ratwatte that the Tamil people had abandoned and repudiated the LTTE who claimed to be their leaders for more than a decade. He claimed in parliament that the Tigers have been defeated both militarily and politically.

He said the government was helping displaced people to rebuild their homes. Roads were being repaired and power and water supplies were being restored. Fertiliser and other agricultural implements were being supplied for them to begin their farming. Large quantities of food and other essential items are being made available to them. Fertiliser was on an extensive list of items previously banned in the north by the government, which feared the Tigers might use it to make bombs.

Welcoming the military success over the LTTE and the return of civilians to Jaffna, Douglas Devananda of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Part (EPDP) said that it was time now to replace it with a political process.

"We welcome the (military) operation, which has almost been completed without much damage to civilian life and property, but we feel this must be followed immediately by an interim civilian administration before a political vacuum sets in," Devananda said

It has been reported that Mr.Devananda met President Kumaratunga and requested that he be allowed to go to Jaffna and work along with the military, and that a similar request had been made by PLOTE. However the President is understood to be averse to the idea of these groups going to Jaffna at this time.

It is learnt that the government is eager to institute a civilian political and administrative structure to run the affairs of the north than rely on the military to carry the burden for too long. In this context, it would seem that consideration is being given to the formation of an "Interim Council" similar to the one proposed following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987. This Council, it is suggested, will be composed of representatives of all political parties and groups committed to the democratic process. It is understood the the Attorney General has been asked to look into the constitutional implications of setting up[such an interim body.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga said on 2 May that her government would begin direct talks with Tamil people on a peace plan to end the ethnic war. About 200,000 people were being resettled in the Valikamam division of northern Jaffna peninsula, she told heads of diplomatic missions and relief agencies working in the north.

In her briefing, she said that the aim of the offensive had been to free people forced out of their homes by the LTTE before the army captured the area late last year.

She added that it was the government's intention to enter into a dialogue on the devolution proposals with the people in the north who had hitherto been denied the opportunity to do so," the statement said. Describing her government's plan to restore civil administration in the peninsula, the President said that 460 government officials and almost 200 retired officials would help the military restore civil administration.

The President appealed to friendly governments and international agencies to support a government effort to repair infrastructure in the north which had been devastated due to years of war.

Buses, the only public transport for many Sri Lankans, belonging to the Sri Lanka Central Transport Board (CTB) have returned to the roads of the Jaffna peninsula after 11 years, according to CTB officials. "The bus service began on 1 May. It has been received enthusiastically by the people. 23 buses were operating in Valikamam district, the western half of the peninsula," they said. The board had to ship in the 23 buses from the mainland and plan to send more as demand arises, they added.

The CTB was using its old bus depot at Kondavil on the northern outskirts of Jaffna town to relaunch the service. More than 70 percent of the depot's original staff had reported to work, they said adding, "We had 150 buses registered to the Kondavil depot, but we couldn't even find a piece of any of them."

Mr.Chelliah Pathmanathan, Government Agent of Jaffna, said that his first task was to restore the civil administration adding that about 40 percent of the government employees, including 300 village officers (Grama Sevakas) and 6000 school teachers had already reported for work.

"We are setting up 71 co-operative stores for food distribution and we hope to start at least some schools. One primary task is to set up a law-and-order machinery. Only three of the police stations are currently funtioning," Mr.Pathmanathan said.

Medical Staff Return

Four hundred members of the staff of the Jaffna Teaching hospital, who had vacated the area following army offensive in October last year, have returned to the hospital, the defence ministry said on 28 April. The hospital is now under the control of the government.

Journalists on Tour of Jaffna

Journalists who have not been allowed into the northern Jaffna peninsula since fighting recommenced in April last year, were taken by plane to Jaffna on 8 May and were afforded the opportunity of a conducted tour from Jaffna's giant Palaly air base, down to Jaffna town, east to Chavakachcheri and the Kilali lagoon crossing point that was sealed off by the military last month.

According to a Reuter report by Nick Macfie, "the British-made Avro transport aircraft that brought the journalists to the area had made a long, low approach over water to Palaly as the Sri Lankan air force pilot took precautions against possible surface-to-air missile attacks.

"Along the route the reporters took, Tamil families could be seen riding bicycles, bullock-drawn carts and tractors, carrying possessions home to the northern Valikamam area they fled when the military launched "Operation Riviresa" last year.

"Unprompted by the soldiers, civilians said they were happy to be returning home and to be out of the clutches of the LTTE who appear to have been routed in the peninsula.

"As they spoke, the LTTE released a communique in London warning the military against further expansion in the north, saying it would bring a "terrible disaster."

"We have been liberated by the armed forces," a retired postal worker said after standing in line for nine hours for his rations from the military. "So far so good." Asked whether he thought the LTTE would return and what they would do next, he said: "That is a puzzling question to answer."

"A chemistry teacher at a Hindu temple said he thought the LTTE might retaliate against the military's efforts to return the civilians and the government's efforts to re-establish a civil administration.

"We need only a peaceful life," he told Reuters. Asked what he thought of the government's devolution plans to bring peace to the country after 13 years of war he said all he knew was that they "would give some rights for Tamils."

"Others nearby said they had not heard of the devolution package, which is currently being discussed by an all-party parliamentary select committee in Colombo.

"A 69-year-old patient at Chavakachcheri hospital said 99 percent of Tamils in the north were happy to return home. "I am very satisfied. My wife is satisfied," he said. "We are getting the medicine, we are getting the vegetables."

"The LTTE, in its statement, quoted its monthly Viduthalai Puligal newspaper as saying the civilians were not returning willingly home but had been trapped in the peninsula by shelling and bombing."

Another Reuter report datelined 9 May said, "Bright shop signboards, trimmed blossom hedges and lazy, shaded gardens tell a story about Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula which contrasts with daily reports of bloodshed during 13 years of ethnic war. Street advertisements and wall paintings tell of businesses and services taken for granted elsewhere in this tropical island but which here have their shutters up to the outside world.

"On one corner is a shop offering video-mixing services. Down the road is a sign suggesting you turn off to enjoy the facilities of "Oscar's Sports Club." Not far away is an artificial insemination centre, a judge's house and something called the "Brilliant Academy."

"In between shops, white flags are sprouting from the gateposts of some houses, marking the return of their owners who fled fighting between the armed forces and the LTTE. Some of the houses are ruined, some are pockmarked with bullets and shrapnel. Some are Dutch and Portuguese style bungalows, set back from the road with wide, cool verandahs and completely intact.

"The centre of Jaffna town is made up of weed-strewn ancient ruins with the Dutch fort, library, police station and post office destroyed in fighting from earlier in the ethnic war which began in 1983.

"The Jaffna government agent, Chelliah Pathmanathan, said 80 percent of the houses in Jaffna town had been damaged. Veteran war reporters said the most noticeable new damage was to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, once the biggest medical facility in the north and now just a shell with a few broken beds and no ambulance. Many patients sleep on the floor. "We once had 1,015 beds," said hospital director N.Kanaga. "Now we have about 200." Medical equipment has been stolen, the sewerage system does not work and there is no running water." ●

(Continued from page 5)

The entire hospital staff, some patients and officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had shifted to Point Pedro in the Vadamarachi region in October-November last year following the capture of the Jaffna town by the army.

Two hospitals have reopened and are crowded with patients. "When the military came in, we shifted the hospital to Point Pedro and returned only a week ago. At the moment we have enough facilities to take care of 5,000 people. We need additional supplies urgently because the town's population is now over 200,000," Dr.Navamalar Kanagaratnam, Director of the Jaffna Hospital said.

Jaffna University To be Reopened

Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna University will be reopened on June 13 andsome schools on the peninsula are already in session, according to official sources in Colombo

Education and Higher Education Minister R. Pathirana who along with his Deputy Prof.Vishva Warnapala visited the Jaffna University complex and some schools in Jaffna city recently, has directed officials of the ministry to take necessary steps to improve the conditions of the schools, the officials said. The Minister is also reported to have directed that the troops who are camped in many schools should vacate them at the earliest possible opportunity to make way for those schools to reopen and function normally.

"Over 100 schools are now reopened in the peninsula including popular schools like St.Johns College, Jaffna Hindu College and Bosco College. These three schools alone have a student population of over 7,000," the Minister said.

A total of 565,000 US dollars has been allocated for improvements and other needs of the University and a further 925,000 US dollars has been set apart for reconstruction and other requirements of schools in the Jaffna peninsula, they said. ●

Tamil Nadu - The Return of Karunanidhi

The veteran Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader Muthuvel Karunanidhi is back in power as Chief Min-ister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu having inflicted a crushing defeat upon the imperious Jayaram Jayalalitha who even failed to win her own seat in the state assembly in the recently held elections in India.

Whether one likes it or not, there is enormous interest among political circles in Colombo in the outcome of elections in India whether they for the central government in Delhi or for the state government in Tamil Nadu. The interest became almost obsessive particularly after the escalation of the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict in the island and the consequent involvement of Delhi and Madras in the evolution of this conflict.

For there are over 55 million Tamils living in Tamil Nadu who have had centuries of linguistic and cultural affinities with Sri Lankan Tamils. As far as the Sinhalese are concerned, politicians and prelates do not fail to remind them of the repeated invasions of the island from south Indian Tamil kings in the distant past.

Karunanidhi championed the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils particularly after the island-wide violence against Tamils in July 1983 following which over 150,000 of them fled to Tamil Nadu as refugees. Even Tamil political leaders including militant groups and their leaders found sanctuary there to pursue their political and militant activities. Political parties in Tamil Nadu competed with each other to display their concern and support for the Sri Lankan Tamils and brought pressure upon Delhi to do the same. Delhi's concern for the resolution of the island's ethnic conflict with the grant of the "legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people" and the eventual arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in the wake of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 was in no small measure to the influence that Tamil Nadu politicians brought to bear upon the central government in New Delhi.

However with the outbreak of fighting between the IPKF and the LTTE in October 1987 the near-unanimity of support in Tamil Nadu for the Sri Lankan Tamils began to gradually fracture. Karunanidhi who was Chief Minister then was accused of supporting the LTTE although it was fighting the IPKF. His failure to receive the IPKF in Madras when it returned in March 1990 was characterised as "anti-national" and was accused by his adversaries as a collaborator of the LTTE. It was primarily on this charge that the Tamil Nadu state government under his Chief Ministership was dissolved and Governor's rule imposed. But Karunanidhi had always maintained that his support to the Sri Lankan Tamils did not mean support to the LTTE or for the creation of a separate state.

However, the murder of Rajiv Gandhi attributed to the LTTE in September 1991 in the run-up to the general elections brought about a substantial change of attitude in India and particularly in Tamil Nadu, both among politicians and the people in regard to the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. In spite of his strenuous denials and without any evidence whatsoever, Karunanidhi was linked with the LTTE and Rajiv's murder by his political opponents and was soundly defeated in the elections held shortly thereafter in which Jayalalitha triumphed.

During the ensuing years, while Jayalalitha had been vocal in her anti-LTTE pronouncements, there have

(Continued on page 29)

An Economy Affected By War

Sri Lanka's economy could easily match the high growth rates of Asian economies like South Korea and Taiwan if not for the war in the country's northeast, the Governor of the country's Central Bank said on 2 May.

Defence spending rose to 34 billion rupees ($629 million) in 1995 from the budgeted figure of 24 billion ($444 million), after Eelam War III broke out in April 1995 following the abrupt breakdown of talks between the Tigers and the government.

"Defence was the single largest item of expenditure in the country in 1995. The budgeted figure for 1996 is 38 billion rupees ($703 million)," the bank's Governor Jayawardena told the press.

He said it contrasted sharply with the scenario of a decade ago when the government spent 55 billion rupees on a project to divert the Mahaweli River, Sri Lanka's longest, to irrigate more land. "If not for this huge spending on defence, we could easily achieve annual GDP (gross domestic product) growth of about eight percent," he said speaking the day after the Central Bank's annual report for 1995 said the economy grew by 5.5 percent last year led by industry, fractionally down from 5.6 percent in 1994.

The armed conflict which began in 1983 had cost the country billions of rupees in defence spending. The north and east, which are rich in resources such as agriculture and fisheries, have not contributed to GDP since the outbreak of the war.

The agriculture sector's contribution to GDP declined to 11 percent in 1995 from 13 percent in 1994. In the early 1960s the share of agriculture in GDP was around 40 percent. It fell to 23 percent in 1990, the Central Bank report said. "Therefore, adding two to three percent more to growth could be done easily if not for the war," said Jayawardena.

Despite the billions wasted both in financial and manpower terms, Sri Lanka's per capita income rose to 713 US dollars, the highest in South Asia, according to official figures. The Central Bank report for 1995 released on 3 May stated that the gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices grew by 14.3 percent in 1995 to 129.053 million US dollars with mid-year population estimated at 18.1 million, and the per capita income rose to 713 US dollars in 1995 from 656 US dollars in previous year.

This level of per capita income is the highest among the South Asian countries, the report said. The bank's annual report further said that in 1995, Sri Lanka continued to maintain the growth momentum achieved in the recent past, the GDP grew by 5.5 percent in real terms, the same as the average growth rate recorded for the previous five years, said the report, adding that the gross national product at constant prices grew by 5.9 percent in 1995 compared with 5.3 percent in 1994. ●

❒ Tamil Tigers guerrillas blasted two electricity transmission towers on 4 May in the eastern province near Trincomalee plunging the northeastern part of the island into darkness. Previously in April the Tigers had blasted two transmission towers at Tambalagamam near Trincomalee.

❒ Five air force personnel, 2 navy persons and 3 civilians who went to the Mantheevu island in eastern Sri Lanka near Batticaloa in a boat carrying lunch and other essential equipment to a leprosy colony on 3 May were subjected to an ambush attack by the Tigers as the boat approached the pier which was blasted by an explosive devise fitted to the pier. An army statement said that the bodies of 4 air force personnel and one civilian were recovered, 3 injured persons were evacuated to the Batticaloa Hospital, and 2 persons were reported to be missing.

❒ An officer and 11 soldiers were killed when Tigers ambushed a road-clearing patrol at Mylanthenna in Punani in the Batticaloa district in the morning of 6 May. Though the military claimed that 18 Tigers were killed and over 30 wounded in the ensuing battle following the arrival of troop reinforcements, there was no independent confirmation as the casualties on the LTTE side. The Tigers, using a rocket-propelled grenade, hit a Unicorn troop carrier bringing in the reinforcements.Rebel radio traffic monitored by the army indicated a Tiger area leader identified as Kunam who led the surprise attack was killed in the firefight, the army claimed.

❒ Navy patrol boats chased and sank five Tamil Tiger craft in northern Sri Lankan waters, killing at least four guerrillas, military officials said on 9 May. They said the wooden- hulled craft known as "theppams" were intercepted when they were taking Tiger cadres to army-held Kayts island west of the Jaffna peninsula. They alleged that the Tigers were trying to infiltrate Kayts island and attack government troops.

❒ On the same day, defence officials claimed that Sri Lankan air force planes blew up a rebel boat carrying arms for Tamil Tigers on 9 May, but two other boats escaped. They said an aircraft on reconnaissance detected a ship unloading arms to three boats in the high seas about 50 miles (80 km) east of Mullaitivu just before sunset."Two MI-24 helicopter gunships and a Pucara ground attack craft were immediately deployed to the area." The aircraft attacked the fleeing boats when suspected rebels in the boats fired at them, the sources said. One boat burst into flames about 10 miles (16 km) from shore but the other two escaped as darkness set in, they said.

France to Repatriate Asylum Seekers

A visiting French government minister has held talks with Sri Lankan officials on a deal to repatriate Sri Lankan refugees living in France, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said on 13 May.

It said in a statement the matter was taken up in talks the previous week between a French delegation headed by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Margie Sudre and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and his aides.

"The two delegations discussed the situation of Sri Lanka asylum seekers in France and preliminary steps towards a possible agreement to facilitate and regulate repatriation through mutual co-operation," it said. A similar arrangement exists between Colombo and Switzerland where also there are an estimated 25,000 Sri Lankan, mostly Tamil asylur seekers.

Thousands of Sri Lankans, mostly Tamils, have sought refuge in France to escape the fighting in northeast Sri Lanka. Most of them have been living in France for many years. ●

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"Recognition of Tigers as Sole Representative of Tamils"

- the First Step to Settlement

by V.Rudhrakumaran

The following are substantial excerpts of a presentation made by Mr.Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, political advisor of the LTTE International Unit, USA, at a conference in Norway on the topic, Conflict in Sri Lanka and International Response on 26 February 1996:

As we are all aware, the recent escalation of violence on the island of Sri Lanka has caused great dismay and alarm. The mounting loss of innocent lives, resulting from the Navaly Church bombing, the Nagarkovil School bombing. "Operation Sunshine". The Colombo bank bombing and the Kumarapuram massacre among the many tragedies has demonstrated that the strategy of "peace through war" is not only untenable but immoral. As the United Nations Secretary-General pointed out in his statement issued on 1 February 1996, the bombing incident in Colombo highlights "the need to find an early negotiated political solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka". Any lasting resolution of the conflict has to be based on the real situation in the island of Sri Lanka. The response of the Tamil people after the politics of exclusion by all Sinhala governments since independence is a realisation that their lives and their interests only be protected by collectively asserting their aspirations is to form of nationhood.

The characterisation of the Tamil Nation's striving to be responsible for its own affairs and to take its destiny in its own hands as a "Terrorist Problem" is an implicit" yet nonetheless glaring denial of the dignity of the Tamil nation. These must be a recognition that the discrimination, deprivation, exclusion from political representation and the power processes as well as the physical insecurity inflicted upon it have forced the Tamil nation to seek a political space of its own.

The brutalization and alienation of the Tamil nation by the oppressive Sinhala governments is much older than the LTTE. Decitizenisation of substantial numbers of Tamils occupying the hill country, long before the birth of any Tamil resistance and long before the birth of any of the member of the LTTE was born, is a clear indication that Sinhala racism is the fundamental problem in Sri Lanka, not the Tamil resistance. As one federal judge in the United States observed, the LTTE arose as a result of the Sri Lankan government's attempt to reduce Tamils to second class citizens or even non-entities. And as Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Mr.Laxman Kadirgamar, aptly put it in his speech at the Asia Society in New York in April 1995: "LTTE is fighting for a cause in which they believe, and there are historical precedents for it, and there is a historical genesis for why they are doing what they do."

The cause of the conflict lies not in "terrorism", but in the brutalization and alienation of the Tamil nation by the Sinhala establishment. President Chandrika Kumaratunge's recent polemical stipulation of LTTE's laying down of arms as a precondition for future negotiations, is a manifestation of the Government's insistence on denying equality to the Tamil Nation. The Tamils constitute"people" under international law and thereby entitled to exercise the right of self determination and, as a corollary the right to engage in armed campaigns. This is in accordance with the General Assembly Declaration of Friendly Relations Among States (GA Res:625) which is considered as a customary international law.

For a successful negotiated outcome both parties should proceed on a principal of fairness and free will. A nation cannot negotiate when it is under occupation. One cannot negotiate under duress. Even the most basic contractual law prohibits it, let alone it being at the level of nations, a violation of the right to self determination. A negotiated settlement that is gained through coercion only serves to perpetuate and institutionalise the conflict in such a way that "peace through war" will become part of the way of life.

A wholly different constructive element is necessary for a truly successful negotiated settlement. The international community has requisite ability to facilitate the peace process and should play a vital role in it. Moral support of the international community for the victim of aggression will prevail upon the aggressor to seek resolution that takes into account the needs and interests of both parties. Unfortunately, in Sri Lanka we are witnessing a phenomenon in which the victim is brutalised then blamed. This is due to the powerlessness of the Tamil people vis a vis their access to the media.

Due to the censorship instituted by the Sri Lankan Government, truth itself has become a victim. Therefore, international opinion regarding the conflict in Sri Lanka is fundamentally biased, and the international community has so far been disinclined to show sympathy for the Tamil victimisation. For example when the peace process in the island collapsed, the blame was put on the LTTE. Now as one diplomat observed, when negotiations collapse the blame rests on the withdrawing party, especially where it is a no-state entity. If the withdrawing party is unable to explain its actions because of its powerlessness and lack of access to the media, however, it has no choice but to bear the brunt of the criticism.

The fact that the Sri Lankan Government was escalating its military might even as the talks were in progress, the fact of LTTE's insistence that the urgent day to day problems of severe food, medicine and fuel shortages be given priority; the fact LTTE's proposals to address four situations of paramount importance out of which three were related to civilian life, the fact that LTTE withdrew from the negotiations in conformity with its three weeks' notice, whereas the Agreement required only a 72 hour notice are all relevant to forming a correct opinion about LTTE's behaviour, but none of them were brought to the international community's attention as a result of the Tamils' lack of media access. On the other hand, the lifting of the food embargo, a belated fulfilment of the

state's moral and legal obligation to its citizen is viewed as a major concession on President Chandrika's part. This is largely due to the manner in which this event was represented in the media. When LTTE explicitly announced its willingness to consider a political arrangement short of an independent state, their act of goodwill was not appreciated by the international community because it had not been adequately covered in the media.

The same asymmetry in the two parties' access to the media results in an effective and swift response by the international community when certain actions are attributed to the LTTE without proof, whereas sheer silence or indifference occur in response to massacres committed by the Sri Lankan government, such as the Navaly church bombing, school bombings and recently the Kumarapuram massacres.

The illusion shared by many today that President Chandrika's devolution package is a panacea for the national conflict in Sri Lanka is also the product of a well-orchestrated media campaign by the Sri Lankan government. It is sad that many "bought" the spurious package without the benefit of a detailed analysis of its contents. It is therefore necessary to examine whether the devolution package indeed provides for meaningful power sharing between Tamils and Sinhalese on the island of Sri Lanka, and whether it is adequate to guarantee the physical security of the Tamil population. It is said in the media and even in some academic circles that the proposal, even though by name it is called a devolution package, in reality embodies a federal formula.

The core of federalism is division of power. In other words no-centralisation is not synonymous with either decentralisation or devolution. Decentralisation or devolution presupposes a higher authority which chooses to dissolve its power. As Daniel Elzar, an expert on Federalism observes the government that can decentralise or devolve can also recentralise it if it so desires. Hence in decentralised systems the diffusion of power is actually a matter of chance, not right, and as history reveals in the long run, it is usually treated as such. Devolution implies hierarchy, a pyramid of government where power flows downward from the top, whereas no-centralisation requires that there can be no single centre, but rather a dispersal of power among a number of centres that must co-ordinate their activities and policies with one another in order to make the entire policy work. "In any hierarchy, the top is expected to have more authority and power than the middle or the bottom, which contradicts the basic principles of federalism."

Moreover, the implications to the effect that their exists a legitimate higher authority in Colombo is false both historically and legally. Consequently, the very notion that power somehow "devolves" from Colombo to the North Eastern Region fails to withstand rational scrutiny.

Another important feature of federalism is over-representation of the constituent unit in the centre so as to enable the unit to participate effectively in policy making and governance. Kumaratunga's proposals are completely devoid of any power sharing arrangement. As the title and the substance of the "Devolution Proposals" reveal beyond any doubt, what is proposed is not anything that resembles even remotely.

The other question is whether the Kumaratunga's proposals allow Tamils to have a last word in the determination of their own destiny. The question before is whether, under the proposed polity on the island of Sri Lanka, the Tamils indeed have sufficient say in matters affecting their national existence.

It should be observed at the outset that the Sri Lankan Government's attempts to undermine the LTTE and to impose the Devolution package upon the Tamils is a clear violation of the Tamils' right to self determination. The devolution package has not been presented to the LTTE and the Government has publicly stated that it will not talk to the LTTE. The first step for negotiated settlement is that the Government should recognise the LTTE as the sole legitimate representative of the Tamils and start to learn to deal with them. Even if the devolution package is implemented with participation of the LTTE, there is nothing to prevent the proposal's provisions from being undone unilaterally by the sheer Sinhala majority.

The Sinhalese in Sri Lanka constitute not only a numerical but also a permanent political majority. While it is true that under a proportional representation no single political party will enjoy a two-thirds majority in Parliament. The combined Sinhala political parties will nevertheless always enjoy at least a two-thirds majority. Furthermore, constituting 74% of the entire population the Sinhalese are able unilaterally to modify or abrogate the whole body of the present proposals. It should be remembered that the Sinhala only Act, the 1972 Constitution and the 1978 Constitution were adopted over the objections of the Tamil nation.

In President Kumaratunge's proposals, the concepts of concurrent majority rule and power sharing at the centre are conspicuous by their very absence. Kumaratunga's proposals also rupture the territorial integrity of Tamil homeland. The proposals clearly state that the currently merged North Eastern Province will be demarcated.

Mrs. Kumaratunge's proposals' life span will be solely dependent upon Sinhalese benevolence. The lessons of history and the most basic prudence do not allow the Tamils to put themselves in such a vulnerable position, especially after the sacrifice of so many lives. History will not forgive us if we do. Thus, if the "Devolution Proposals" truly become a step towards terminating the conflict, it must go beyond the present proposals provisions for a concurrent majority rule and parity at the centre.

The "Devolution Proposals" are silent about specific changes that the boundaries of the devolved unit will undergo. By contrast with Belgium, when the established boundaries may only be changed by a special two-thirds majority vote in Parliament combined with a majority of votes within each linguistic group, the boundaries that will be established for the Northern and Eastern regions will be liable to unilateral alterations by the Sinhala dominated centre.

Thus it is not only enough that the Northern region should compromise the existing Northern and Eastern provinces, but also provision must be made that the region's boundaries may not be changed without the consent of the respective council.

The crux of the matter is that the island of Sri Lanka is inhibited by at least two distinct nations, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Muslims have separate identity though they have not made a claim for nationhood. The current conflict has resulted from the exclusion of the Tamil nation by the Sinhalese from the political and the power process. Unfortunately, the Colombo political establishment lacks the courage or candour to admit this truth. The denial and de-

ception on the part of the Colombo political establishment are not merely self defeating but they hinder all prospects of negotiated settlement that will squarely address the cause of the conflict. Recognition of this simple truth, namely that the island of Sri Lanka is inhibited by two nations who have the right to nationhood will help the parties to address the core issue fairly and squarely.

It is refreshing that there is a growing awareness of the true cause of the conflict on the part of the Colombo establishment. The Island newspaper carried an editorial which suggested that the Sri Lankan Government should confine the regional councils to the North and East only. Even if the Colombo political establishment lacks integrity to treat the conflict as one of a national nature, and insists on dealing with it by way of a "Regional" formula, it must acknowledge that the North Eastern Council is not just another council, but an entity whose function it is to protect and promote the aspirations of the Tamil nation. This involves an asymmetrical relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada was instituted by the British North American Act, and envisaged in the Meechlake Accord and the Charlestown Accord. Such asymmetrical relationships are also observed in Malaysia and to some degree in Germany and Switzerland.

Asymmetry normally applies to three aspects of a federation namely to the Constituent unit, to Jurisdiction and to representation at the centre, even though the form of asymmetry with respect to the Constituent unit is indeed envisaged by President Kumaratunge's devolution package, it provides for no jurisdictional or representational asymmetry.

The issue of asymmetry is of utmost importance and entails significant practical consequences concerning the nature of the settlement the "Devolution Proposals" seek to effect. The proposals provide for the establishment of the conference of chief ministers which is to be vested with considerable authority. Lacking a symmetrical provision, the North Eastern Council will be confined to the status of yet another ordinary body alongside the eight Sinhala Councils. In other words the Tamil dominated North East Council will be reduced to a permanent minority among those entities, which will effectively bar the North Eastern Council from effective participation in the power process. Therefore, asymmetry should be regarded as an indispensable first step toward any meaningful settlement. The proposed Northern Council must be much more than an ordinary regional council; it must genuinely express, enact and represent the aspirations of the Tamil Nation. Anything less than that is heresy and stands no chance.

Besides lacking power sharing at the centre, any power sharing between the centre and the region is lopsided...Under the "Devolution Proposals" , the regions are endowed with the power to be consulted and burdened with the obligation to get concurrence from the centre in the areas of state land, finance, law and order and education. The meaning and depth of consultative power is illustrated by President Kumaratunga and the author and the Constitutional Minister Professor G.L.Peiris in the context of state land. Under the proposal it is stated that the centre may utilise the state land for the purposes "in respect of a reserved subject" in consultation with the Regional Council. According to Professor G.L.Peiris, virtually "connotes informing" as distinct from concurrence, and the state will have the full ability to deprive a regional council of its land even if the council would object to it. It follows then that consultative power is nothing but a hollow one.

As the current situation demonstrates, a negotiated settlement may become feasible only with active participation of the international community. The rational is that the distrust between two parties is too deep, as such the effective communication is impossible in the absence of an international mediator. We have consistently said that it welcomes international mediation. But unfortunately recently the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister said, even after the loss of 50,000 people and the fact that the conflict has gone on for 12 years, they were matured enough to resolve the conflict. This is a childish and unfortunate attitude for the Government to assume. This kind of attitude and arrogance will only serve to perpetuate the conflict.

It is high time that the international community should become aware of its vital and moral responsibility in this regard. The Tamils' behaviour in the conflict grows out of real conditions. It should be remembered they have been living in a continual state of war for over ten years now. It should also be recognised that the Tamils are deprived by the Sri Lankan government of the most essential, elementary rights and dignities. It should be borne in mind that unlike the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE which currently administers a do-facto state, does not have the luxury of a state apparatus to rely on.

A recognition of the above realities along with the moral incentives that the international community has at its disposal will enable it to exercise influence over the parties and the final outcome of the conflict. Supplying the Sri Lankan Government with more aid than it had asked for and remaining passive observers of the Sri Lankan Government's calculated genocidal attacks, while at the same time maintaining a critical and hostile attitude towards the victim, are not policies that add to the dignity of the victim, are not policies that add to the dignity of the international community or contribute toward a peaceful resolution. The victims' faith inf the international community's sense of goodness and justice should not be betrayed.

The argument that state-to-state relations take precedence over relations with no-state entities does not really hold water. International law and international relations have long recognised that no-state entities are legitimate actors in international life. The recognition of human rights is one example where priority is assigned to no-state entities. over states. With all this in mind, the international community should reconsider the attitude towards LTTE's legitimate campaign and find a new course of action with respect to the conflict in the Island of Sri Lanka.

As I have attempted to demonstrate the imperatives pointing in this direction are above all of a moral nature. On the legal side of the issue, it is essential to recognise that since self determination is a legitimate and internationally recognised right. LTTE in charge of a defacto state, has every right to be treated as a government. Negotiations toward the conflict's resolution should thus be conducted on what amounts to an inter- governmental basis. The international community's efforts in trying to bring about peace in the island of Sri Lanka will be best applied if it tries to create incentives for both parties to re-open negotiations with the above realisation in mind. ●

The Post Operation Riviresa 2 Phase

by S.D.Sivaram, Colombo

The PA government has had two remarkable successes in dealing with the multiple crises in the north and the south which had developed since the conclusion of Operation Riviresa in December last year. The euphoria generated in the south by the capture of Jaffna turned, within the course of a few months, into general disaffection which was systematically exacerbated by the UNP. The non-government press, with which the President's relationship has not been on the best of terms ever since she assumed office, regularly highlighted aspects of Eelam War Three which corroborated the impression of Riviresa as a pyrrhic victory. Most of the east had come under the LTTE's control. Troops were getting hit often in the Valigamam sector which Operation Riviresa was supposed to have brought under government control after "defeating and driving the Tigers away from their own backyard". More than three hundred soldiers were killed in the months that followed the victory mirth of Riviresa. The Sea Tigers, it was obvious, were as powerful as they had been before the fall of Jaffna. They had blown up a Dvovra Fast Attack Craft off the Vettilaikerni coast, sunk two army(?) Patrol boats near Mannar killing ten soldiers, and attacked the Colombo harbour the impregnability of which had almost been taken for granted since the government became aware of the threat two years ago.

And above all the capital itself was insecure. The UNP gave a memorandum to the President on the inadequacy of security arrangements to safeguard Colo- mbo. Food prices began to rise beyond a tolerable level. Private bus owners were threatening to raise their fares. And to top this all Thondaman and most plantation sector trade unions announced a strike.

Riviresa 2 began at this juncture. There had been wide speculation in Tamil political circles that this long expected operation had been put on hold due to the Indian elections. But the Operation started right on the eve of the Indian polls. Meanwhile a section of the press in the south cried foul at Thondaman for bringing the estate sector to a standstill when an army was about to deliver another fatal blow to the Tigers. The strike, it was claimed, was a ploy to divert the government's attention away from Operation Riviresa 2. A cartoon in the 'Lakbima' - one of the main Sinhala Sunday papers showed Thonda placing a bomb behind a soldier in a bunker on the war front. The issue of the plantation strike was further compounded by the CWC's decision to bring a no confidence motion against Mr Ratnasiri Wickrmamnayake, the minister for plantations who had issued a stern warning to the unions while the President was away in China. The warning was seen as a very hostile act by the CWC.

As the month of April was drawing to a close the government appeared to be mired in what appeared to be intractable multiple crises. But then almost overnight things started turning in the government's favour. Thonda compromised. The no confidence motion crisis was averted much to the UNP's disappointment.

And later that week the government was able to take forty foreign and local journalists to some of the areas in the peninsula which had been captured during Riviresa One and Two. The defence attaches of foreign missions in Colombo were taken a day ahead of the press. With this the government was able to prove once and for all that Operation Riviresa Two had brought a substantial number of civilians into areas in the peninsula which had come under army control. Speaking on the extension of the island wide emergency, the Deputy Minister for Defence General Anurudha Ratwatte claimed that more than two hundred thousand civilians had come into areas which were und- er his forces. The press, which was taken to Jaffna on 8 May, visited the town, Kilali and Chavakachcheri.

A press conference was arranged with the Jaffna G A Mr Chelliah Pathmanathan. He said that almost eighty percent of the houses in the Jaffna town and its environs were damaged or destroyed. The GA informed the journalists that about 55 percent of the government employees about 40 percent of the school teachers and about 300 Grama Sevekas had reported to work. Schools, according to him, are scheduled to reopen on 13 May. He, however, did not say anything to confirm the government's claim that more than two hundred thousand people have trekked back into the Valigamam sector and part of the Thenmaradchi division. Mr Pathmanathan stated, quite prudently, that about forty percent of the people displaced in the past had returned to their homes. But officers said that an official count of the number of people who came back is yet to be taken.

There is a major problem in connection with the distribution of food. Fuel still seems to be in short supply. Some villages, according to a foreign aid age-ncy, have been almost completely destroyed. Medicine is in short supply. A large number of wells have to be cleaned in order to ensure an adequate supply of drinking water. The main obstacle to many people who are going back to settle in their homes in the presence of undetected mines and explosives. The army is yet to venture into some areas and clear them of explosives.

In the first few days following the conclusion of Operation Riviresa Two, there was a steady increase in the number of patients going to the Jaffna hospital OPD. Of these a significant number had been injured by mines and improvised explosive devices. The army has no idea of the minefields which the LTTE may have left behind; and in some instances some minefields laid by the army itself may lie unnoticed due to the very fluid military situation obtaining in the peninsula now.

A foreign aid agency worker said that this is common to such situations where there has been intense fighting involving a large number of battalions on the move. One unit moving on into another area in the heat of the battle may forget to hand down the map of the minefields it may have laid to the unit temporarily succeeding it in that particular sector. Some areas such as the pre-Riviresa One, defence perimeter of the Palaly base are, according to some military sources, so heavily mined that if the government govern-

ment is serious about resettling everyone who wants to get back to his or her village in Valigamam, it will have to draw up an extensive programme to detect and remove the minefields which are found in varying densities in almost every part of the KKS electorate. This can take several years even if foreign aid is sought for the task. The government is apparently and perhaps justifiably keen to first consolidate the gains of a publicity and supposedly political drive aimed at showing the world and the Tamils that the people of Jaffna have completely "reject- ed the fascist Tigers by voting with their feet". But the real task which lies ahead is clearly enormous.

Once the Ministry of Defence and the department of information are through with their respective or joint mandates, the treasury has to come with a lot of money for the work the ministry of Reha- bilitation and Reconstruction has to do in the peninsula. "This will be the final test which will determine the government's proclaimed bona fides on the Tamil question", commented one of the Tamil leaders who remains non-plussed by the success of Op. Riviresa 2. There was also a report that two officials from the northeastern provincial council on May 6 to re-establish a section of the civil administration in the army controlled areas of the peninsula.

It was also reported that the government has decided to fill the large number of vacancies which exist in the civil service with educated unemployed youth in the army controlled areas of the peninsula. Another team of officers from the NE provincial council were also in Jaffna recently to study the matter.

In the midst of all this seemingly enthusiastic flurry of activities, there are some analysts who are close to the Sri-Lankan military establishment who still refuse to take the LTTE for granted especially because of the oft ignored fact that it smoothly moved away without as much as "stooping to pick up a pebble to throw" at the advancing columns of the army by way of a token resistance. This, they say, is a well thought out strategic withdrawal and as such should not be underestimated at this juncture. Their apparent concern is that the LTTE still retains the key advantage in the war for the peninsula which is the control of the two main motorable land routes to Jaffna from beyond the borders of the northern province in conjunction with a proven ability to interdict the government's supply lines by air and sea.

But there is strong speculation in the north that the government might soon concentrate its efforts in building up its strength in the Pooneryn sector with a view to dominate the area to the south up to Mulangavil, initially and then grad-ually or rapidly take control of the road to Mannar which branches west to Man- nar island and east to Vavuniya at the Thallady junction where the army has a large base. The road also connects Mada-wachiya at the Parayanalankulam junction south east of Thallady. The government may find it easier to dominate this road because to its west lies the sea.

Whereas the road from Vavuniya to Kilinochi has vast tracts of untamed wilderness and farmlands which are difficult to wrest from the LTTE's hands. The Chavakacheri-Kerathivu-Sangupiddy-Pooneryn-Mulangavil-Thallady-Mannar road is similar to the main access road to Batticaloa in that it cannot be easily attacked and kept under control for long without exposing one's military positions to government forces which, if the need were to arise, overwhelm it from the sea.

Moreover the access road to Batticaloa has been controlled, since the time troops were pulled out in large numbers from the east for Operation Riviresa, with nothing more than troops amounting to two battalions, spread along the road in small camps. The Tigers despite their str- ength in the hinterlands have thus far not been able to completely cut off the government's line of supply.

There is speculation that the army hopes to manage the Madawachiya-Thallady-Pooneryn-Chavakacheri road in a similar fashion. Rather than dominate the road with large camps the idea is to have small camps which are close to each other and which send out patrols to clear the road whenever a convoy has to move along. If this is achieved in the near future the Sea Tigers may become redundant in the LTTE's current strategy. The Sea Tiger arm of the Liberation Tigers is still considered the most effective threat to the government's post Riviresa gains in the north because it has demonstrated time and again that it can destabilise the vital sea supply route to the peninsula.

If a land access route is opened up, of what use will the Sea Tigers be to the LTTE? Ask military analysts. In addition to the pure military advantages which may accrue to the army from opening a land route, there might be a political bonus as well. The people in the Vanni may be weaned away from the closed econo- my of the LTTE by the easy access the Pooneryn-Mannar road might offer to Jaffna and Colombo. The Tiger leadership, obviously mindful of all this, is quiet. Either it is too weak to respond - which does not seem to be the case - or it is waiting for something which might provide it with an opportune moment to strike again.

Nevertheless, it has to first resolve the current refugee crisis in its area of control in the Vanni. Contrary to the claims of the government and some censored reports in the non-government press a substantial number of people moved out of the Thenmaradchi sector and fled into the Tiger controlled parts of the Vanni while the army was moving in. According to some officials in the area there are about 200 families in Kilinochi, 500 in Nedun- kerny, 2,000 persons in Vavuniya north and fifty thousand persons in Mullaithivu who arrived during Riviresa Two. Some have also fled into the Vadamaradchi division which is yet to be brought under military control.

Officials said that the government has not yet granted permission to take dry rations to these displaced people except for a few loads of rice. This might be a measure to build up, pressure on the displaced population to make them return to Jaffna and in the process exacerbate the friction between them and the LTTE. The problem however is that even if this strategy were to work and there are enough people who are willing to get away from the LTTE, the army, out of concern for its own safety, is keeping all access routes from the Vanni to the peninsula sealed.

In the final analysis it is too early to predict that all's going well for the government politically and militarily in Eelam War Three. The control of territory is all that has changed but the balance of forces still remains largely unaltered. The government has only its political acumen - which may dwindle fast to save itself from getting stuck in a quagmire which Eelam War Three may well turn out to be. ●

THE "WAR FOR PEACE" AND POLITICAL SOLUTION

By Dr S Narapalasingam

In the relatively short period since the "war for peace" began, both sides have incurred considerable losses in personnel and hardware. This has been the most expensive period compared with previous phases of the war. The problem of refugees is also more severe than during previous occasions. In so far as the displaced people are concerned, their immediate concern is to get liberated from the miserable conditions they are languishing in temporary overcrowded shelters without basic facilities. Even in their worst dreams, they would not have dreamt that they would be in this miserable state. All they would wish right now is to return to their homes and survive with the basic facilities available to them. In their present plight, the debate on the political solution by the few who are determining their distant future is not their immediate concern.

In the "war for peace", every single move and countermove by the two sides have only hardened the attitudes of the people on either side of the divide, damaged communal harmony, aggravated suspicion and distrust and made the resolution of the conflict through peaceful means increasingly difficult. It is now no longer a Tamil problem but a major national issue, as it has afflicted the entire population of the country and adversely affected its economy in both the short and the longer term. The death threat sent by an extreme Sinhalese group calling itself"Blood Vipers" to the political parties and their leaders is really an affront to the vast majority of Sri Lankans, past and present, who have cherished democratic freedom. Besides the emergence of political violence and violent uprisings, the way political parties have functioned while in power has undermined democracy pushing the country towards anarchy.

The JVP is reported to be conducting indoctrination classes now, and rising unemployment and economic hardship may present the right conditions for another insurrection. Its success is, however, doubted by former Sinhalese dissidents now in the mainstream of democratic politics. If it occurs, it will only be another dent in the island's economy, reinforcing the vicious circle of economic hardship, unrest and violence.

Hearts and Minds

Government's "war for peace" approach, has not helped one bit to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people. On the contrary, it has served admirably its opponent to convince the Tamil civilians caught in the war that the Government is determined to destroy them by indiscriminate artillery shelling and aerial bombing. The charge of "genocidal intentions" against the Tamils has been constantly propagated by the LTTE. Its leader categorically stated in his recent message to the people and leaders of Tamil Nadu: "We are fighting to protect our people from racial annihilation." Opportunities have been presented time and again for the LTTE to demonstrate that it is the true protector of the Tamils against a brutal enemy. The forced evacuation of civilians in the Valikamam region to Thenmaradchi and Vanni areas is being justified on the same grounds. It is claimed by its supporters that by this humanitarian act, thousands of innocent lives have been saved. The humiliating way the Tamils in Colombo regardless of their known credentials are arrested and detained in police cells, after the recent bombing incidents cannot inspire many Tamils to support the present approach to restore peace in the country.

Another disquieting feature resulting from the continuance of the war is the return of the horrible practice of arbitrary arrests, detention and even disappearances of suspects (now they are the Tamils in the South) against which the parties in the present Government campaigned in the 1994 general election. The Government also reinstated the powers of the Human Rights Task Force in mid-1995 to enable it to monitor and safeguard the rights of the detainees. Specific procedures have also been laid down to ensure that the beastly events of the past are not repeated. Despite these praiseworthy moves of the Government, the breach of the rules reported by Amnesty International, if allowed to persist will destroy its leaders' popular image within and outside Sri Lanka. The familiar rule under emergency powers has also returned.

Counter-producture Approach

According to retired Air Force Commander Harry Goonetilleke, the war operations have been politically motivated. In this view, Operation Riveresa I was a disaster, except for denting the ego of the LTTE, nothing else of military significance was gained. His pessimism on the likely outcome of Operation Riveresa II is discernable from his recent comment: "The war is a long, long way from over." Government's restriction preventing independent journalists to visit the LTTE-controlled and the "liberated" areas has not helped to raise awareness among all sections of the population to influence the enthusiasts of the "war for peace", the necessity to abandon this counterproductive approach of seeking peace. Further colossal and pointless losses seem inevitable, without the prospect of getting any closer to the peace goal. LTTE's spokespersons and front organisations abroad have appealed for help from third parties to end the war, following the recent military setbacks of the group in the North. But, given LTTE's past record on the manner cease-fire agreements have been broken and peace talks used for tactical purposes, political analysts have attributed different motives to the latest appeal. Government too has so far not taken this seriously.

At least no party denies the intolerable suffering of the Tamil people, who are pawns in the war. However, those who have no family and cultural links with the North-East may not understand the severity of the hardship and the psychological trauma that have struck the people there. In President Kumaratunga's words, they are "caught between the devil and the deep blue sea" (her recent interview published in The Hindu of 27 March). It was alleged recently in the reports of foreign news agencies that food supplies to Tamil refugees in northern Sri Lanka had slowed because Tamil Tiger guerrillas and a pro-government Tamil militia were extorting money from truck drivers. If this is true, from where can the suffering Tamils expect relief to alleviate their pain?

The continuation of the war cannot be justified under any pretext. It is only pushing further the "peace" goal and making reconciliation that must follow difficult. By Government's own admission, its aim is not to force some superficial solution through military means. It is, therefore obliged to weigh all costs in relation to the military gains achievable, without destroying completely the trust necessary for achieving its ultimate goal. If a permanent political solution to the national problem acceptable to all the communities is the desired goal, then the present approach seems contradictory.

Short-sighted Approach

The President's explanation for the failure of the last peace talks is accepted by the international community, confirming

her standing as a just and far-sighted national leader. To quote from her interview, "We would have preferred to solve it (the ethnic conflict) through dialogue. But Mr Prabhakaran refused point blank to even agree to begin discussions on the political solution. We kept telling him that we had a general draft of a devolution package that we wanted to give. By December 1994, the devolution package was in our hands. It was the same thing that was offered in August. We offered to discuss it with them, send it to him, discuss it with him. I have all the letters, he constantly kept refusing."

LTTE has not denied the fact that it broke the cease-fire agreement unilaterally in April 1995. The reasons for this decision, as given by its leader can be discerned from the message he sent to the people and leaders of Tamil Nadu at the end of last year (TT January 1996). The decision to resume the war had been based prematurely on the presumption that the Government had a hidden agenda, contrary to its declared intention of settling the conflict peacefully through negotiations. Presumably, the Government did not reveal its package of proposals during the peace talks with the LTTE, when the latter kept refusing to discuss them. LTTE had apparently decided not to waste time but to attack and show its fighting power to the newly elected Government. The leader must have had doubts about accomplishing his own hidden Agenda through negotiations. World opinion and other consequences of their action to the Tamils as a community that must live alongside other communities in Sri Lanka were secondary to the aim of capturing power to rule. The wisdom of this short-sighted and irresponsible approach will also be judged by historians at some future time.

Rebels and Revolutionaries

In retrospect, LTTE's refusal to discuss the Government's political solution has been very costly from the standpoint of a diplomatic strategy. Had some understanding been reached then, and the agreed package been revised subsequently under pressure by the very same forces that are opposing it even after the contents have been tinkered with, the world opinion would have swung in Tamil's favour. More importantly, by resuming the war LTTE has not achieved anything in terms of enhancing the bargaining strength to justify both its decision to reject the 1994 peace initiatives of President Chandrika Kumaratunga as well as the additional lives sacrificed and the sufferings endured by the Tamil people. In fact the opposite has happened.

The publicly declared goal of the LTTE, which its leadership thinks is achievable through military means must be examined objectively from the standpoint of the social and economic well-being of future generations of Tamils. If emotions, vengeance and narrow organisational interests influence the decision to continue the war, then there is the high risk of undermining even the legitimate demands of the Tamils. Attention is drawn to the distinction between a rebel and a revolutionary. A rebel by definition resists authority or control and/or fights against established government and, therefore, will not be amenable to persuasion and pragmatic compromise. On the other hand a revolutionary fights for change in the established order and will be pragmatic accepting the best possible deal at the opportune time. Hence, rebels fail and true revolutionaries succeed in "liberation" struggles.

Unfair Criticism

President Kumaratunga, in her interview referred to earlier, has also expressed her dissatisfaction over the reluctance of Tamil leaders to take risk and openly announce that the only solution to the "Tamil problem" is not murderous politics of the LTTE but a political solution. She is also disappointed that they have not started a "democratic campaign to get the Tamil people on the side of devolution away from the terroristic politics". In contrast, she has drawn attention to the efforts made by the Government through the "White Lotus Movement" and the like to "preach to the Sinhala people, almost a Messianic message about the necessity for ethnic harmony about the fact of a political solution being the only possible solution". The Tamil leaders in the democratic mainstream have responded to this criticism by stating that it is unfair "to say we are shirking our responsibility. We are honestly and sincerely working towards it."

The present Government has repeatedly compared its "open democratic" way of introducing constitutional changes to the hasty way the last Government handled the Indo-Sri Lanka package. To quote the President, "we had the confidence and the courage to put this controversial issue before the people and get them to discuss it at every level". Given the fact that the coalition Government has only a one-seat majority in Parliament, with the constituent parties having diverse views on the devolution package and that a two-thirds majority is required to incorporate the proposals along with other major reforms in the constitution, the early mobilisation of public opinion in support of these reforms is crucial to the success of the noble and sincere effort to solve the national problem. The suggestion to have a non-binding referendum on the package ion order to demonstrate that all communities want a political settlement, before the proposals are presented to Parliament is sound in the present circumstances and should be seen from this perspective.

But the present position of the Tamils and Muslims in the constitutional exercise cannot be equated with that of the Sinhalese. It is easy for the Sinhalese leaders to persuade the latter to accept any diluted form of devolution, having started from a very extensive set as proposed originally on 3 August 1995. The very opposite is the case In so far as the minority communities are concerned. In the present confused and tensed situation, a campaign to enlighten the Tamil people of the necessity to accept a devolution package, whose contents are not yet known in the final form will be counterproductive.

Misgivings

The writer's view is that there are no qualms about the sincerity of the Government and other political parties representing Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims to seek a political solution. Even the LTTE claims that it is not against a political solution. There are, however, misgivings about the correctness of their approaches to resolve the national problem politically, given the realities on the ground. The all-party parliamentary select committee on constitutional reforms that is studying the legal draft of the devolution proposals has yet to reach a consensus and the indications are that this is not going to be easy and quick, as there seems to be opposition even to the watered down version of the original proposals. Even the constituent parties in the Government appear to have contradictory views on the present set of proposals. The Tamil leaders who welcomed the original devolution proposals are unhappy about the modifications introduced in the legal draft. Certainly, the devolution principle enunciated inthe package cannot be the issue that is worrying the Tamil politicians. Without knowing the contents of the final package likely to be presented to Parliament and to the people in a referendum, after the present discussions have been concluded, it is premature to expect from them a commitment to the draft in the present form. The way opposition to the package is being galvanised by the Buddhist clergy and some political parties keen to be seen as the saviours of the Sinhala nation, there is the real concern that the committee in the end would adopt a different package acceptable only to the majority community. Time is, unequivocally, not on the side of the supporters of devolution, aspiring to seek political solution to the conflict through this means.

Political Solution Prerequisites

Those wanting to keep the country unified have not provided any economic arguments against separation. The only argument they have been advancing constantly is an emotive one based on remote historical events, which have no relevance either now or in the future. We are not living in the past. The advantages of power-sharing and the pooling of all available resources to satisfy human needs and improve the living conditions of the people of all communities must be highlighted in any campaign to get the people on the side of devolution. The consequences of separation to the regional and national economies have so far not been explained in any rational manner. In the modern world, contentment is not achieved by the exhibition of racial pride and supremacy and valour as protectors of their religious faith. Nor can it be sustained by pronouncing continually that the power to rule is safely with the people. Constant improvement in the living standards of all citizens of the country is required for its attainment. This in turn requires not rhetoric and fighting power but concerted effort aimed at accelerating the balanced growth of the economy. The wants of the people now are very significantly more than those of their ancestors, who lived in the Dutugemunu - Ellalan era. These will continue to rise in the years to come. Sri Lankans must be made to realise that internal conflicts and the attendant underdevelopment profoundly hinder the satisfaction of their rising needs in several ways.

Since the resumption of hostilities a year ago, the conditions for having direct talks between the two sides have deteriorated dramatically. Besides, there is no rapport between the LTTE and the Tamil parties currently in contact with others functioning outside the North-East region. There is no umbrella organisation like the Palestinian National Council for discussing strategies and reviewing previous decisions taken collectively to regain the legitimate rights and safeguard the common interests of the Tamil community. The PLO is not the only organisation represented in the Council. Groups opposed to it and its leader President Yasser Arafat are also in the Council. The dire strait of the Lankan Tamils may not be obvious to those who have only superficial understanding of the way the Tamil revolt has evolved over the past decade, distancing the people from the democratic leadership.

Return of the Displaced

At the present time, the opinions of the Tamils and Muslims in Colombo may be dismissed as not relevant to the determination of the political future of their fellow members in the North-East. The Tamils living outside the North and East have not experienced the trauma their fellow members there are facing without the basic human facilities needed for their survival and still subject to shelling and bombing. The people in the North-East region are not in a position, mentally and physically, to decide freely without any prejudice and intimidation, between separation and political devolution. Immediate alleviation of their economic hardship and escape from the sense of siege must be felt, for them to be in a clear state of mind to consider the benefits of devolution. As a matter of priority, all the persons displaced from the Jaffna peninsula must first return back to their homes. Actually, undue prolongation of their sufferings will only support the aim of keeping them alienated from the Government and the rest of the society. Recent communiqués of the Government following its military successes after Operation Riveresa II was launched on 19 April, indicate that a sizeable number of persons displaced from the Valikamam area at the end of last year are returning now. Some normalcy must prevail in the North-East for their resettlement and for them to live without any harassment and fear.

At the present time, there are several fundamental questions that remain yet to be answered. Who will venture to explain the implications of the devolution proposals to the safety, security, language, education, racial equality, employment and development concerns of the Tamil people in the North-East at this uncertain time? Can the Tamil leaders based in Colombo do this? Will a set of proposals approved by a simple majority decision of the select committee without the consent of the LTTE have credibility among those Tamils, who have faced the brunt of the sufferings of the war and the economic embargo imposed by the previous and present governments? They have also been intensively indoctrinated over sufficiently long periods by the LTTE's communication network to distrust the Sinhalese leaders. These are serious questions that cannot be simply brushed aside.

An Action Programme

In order to avoid a major disaster and possible damage to its own international image as advocate of the peace option to settle the conflict in a just manner, the Government should consider in earnest changing course of implementing an action programme early, that will create the right climate for all communities to accept the devolution proposals, as an alternative to separation. As stated at the very outset, recent events and actions of the Government have seriously poisoned the climate needed for reconciliation and peace. Following the escalation of violence since the "war for peace" began with a vengeance, the hardened attitudes of the two warring parties make it difficult to take early measures to end the war permanently. A third party mediation is needed to achieve this first objective. If this can be achieved, the biggest obstacle to peace would have been removed. Unless this is done, any attempt to impose a political solution cannot succeed.

The weaknesses in the last attempt to observe a cease-fire that led to its collapse and the resumption of the war with extreme intensity with each side accusing the other of bad faith should be a lesson for preventing any repeat of the same. Unless the Government and the LTTE are willing to place the interest of the suffering people caught in the war above their separate military interests, there is no prospect for them to get the much needed relief at this critical time. Hopefully, lessons would have been learnt by all parties from the costly mistakes made during the past 13 years including those that escalated the conflict into a bloody war in the first instance and subsequent peace talks that failed for reasons well known now.

Foreign Mediation?

Not only the Tamil parties which supported the peace initiative of the Government but also the broad minded Sinhalese feel now without some foreign mediation between the Government and the LTTE, the problem cannot be solved. The co-operation of the UNP is also paramount to the eventual success of any mediation efforts of a third party. In fact, the way politicking is proceeding now, mediation seems necessary even to bring on board the Government and the main opposition UNP to solve this national problem! If the two major parties, SLFP and UNP, can reach an agreement on the framework for political devolution, this would facilitate the subsequent peace talks as well as the task of convincing the Sinhalese electorate about the merits of the agreed formula and solving the conflict. The continuation of the past practice of opposing political solutions acceptable to the minority communities by either of the two main political parties for the purpose of using the problem to sustain or regain lost popular support among the Sinhalese electorate will only help the extremists to whom peace and national development are not important. The mere ending of the war does not necessarily imply lasting peace, a necessary condition for sustained economic growth and national development; a concerted effort by all communities and political parties is needed to achieve this final objective. ●

HOW JR HOUNDED MS B OUT OF POLITICS

By V W Kularatne

The gift to the Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike on her 80th birthday - the proposed invalidation of the Civic Rights disabilities by the monstrous Special Presidential Commissions Inquiry Law No. 7 of 1978 is indeed a welcome move. For its symbolic negation of the infamy caused to her through the inhuman damage of the UNP Government was done by depriving Ms Bandaranaike of her civic rights and keeping her out from Parliament, from the early hours of 17 October 1980 thereby enabling J R Jayewardene to win the Presidential Election in 1982 and also to postpone the General Elections by six years by the infamous and rigged referendum on a trumped up charge of a Naxalite movement alleged by the UNP.

On 1 February 1978 Prime Minister J R Jayewardene introducing the Bill which finally became Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry Law No. 7 of 1978 told the National State Assembly that the Commissions of Inquiry Act did not provide inter-alia for any punishment flowing from the decision of the Commission and also that it does not give enough power to admit certain types of evidence. Mr Jayewardene's aim was to make use of the 5/6th steam-roller majority in the NSA to pass the Bill with ease to remove the main opponent who could have frustrated the dream of J R Jayewardene to win the Presidential Election.

The Bill

The Bill was heavily debated in the National State Assembly. Ms Bandaranaike made a valuable contribution. Messrs Amirthalingam, Sivasithambaram and Sambandan made no lesser contributions against the Bill. R Premadasa waxed eloquence on the justification of the barbarian piece of legislation and Lalith Athulathmudali played no lesser part in addition to his justification of the legal implications for whom the Evidence Ordinance did not matter. Whilst I do not wish to speak of the dead the Hansard speaks volumes and it is with regret it has to be stated that Lalith Athulathm- udali would have repented to the utmost during his last stages on this kind of legislation. Section 9 of the said Special Pre- sidential Commissions of Inquiry Law No. 7 of 1978 is reproduced below:

"S9(1)Where a Commission finds at the Inquiry and reports to the President that any person has been guilty of any act of political victimisation, misuse or abuse of power, corruption or any fraudulent act, in relation to any court or tribunal or any public body or in relation to the administration of any law or the administration of justice, the Commission shall recommend whether such person should be made subject to civic liability, and the President shall cause such finding to be published in the Gazette as soon as possible, and direct that such report be published.

S9(2)Any report, finding, order, determination, ruling or recommendation made by a Commission under this Law shall be final and conclusive, and shall not be called in question in any court or tribunal by way of writ or otherwise."

It was no doubt designed mainly to strip the civic rights of Ms Bandaranaike and that of Felix R Dias Bandaranaike and Nihal Jayawickrema. Later by G P de Silva Commission A H M Fowzie's civic rights were stripped and its is hilarious to state that he was found guilty of providing a water tap in a garden which made him pay the supreme penalty of the loss of civic rights.

When the Bill came before the Constitutional Court, the then Attorney-General Siva Pasupathy addressed the Constitutional Court and they found that the Bill was not inconsistent with any provisions of the Constitution whilst very few of us knew what to do when the Bill became law and the law was to set in motion by the appointment of a Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry.

By Warrant dated 29 March 1978 the President appointed J C T Weeraratne, S Sharvananda and K C E de Alwis to inquire into and report whether between 29 May 1970 and 23 July 1977 Sirimavo Bandaranaike who was the Prime Minister during that period committed any of the acts set out in Section 9 of the said Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry Law No. 7 of 1978. It is indeed poetic justice (with no reflection on Mr Sharvananda) that after his innings as the Chief Justice Mr Sharvananda was removed from the Governorship of the Western Province by President D B Wijetunga.

President's Council H L de Silva, the present Permanent Representative of the United Nations followed the developments very keenly to avoid Ms Bandaranaike being guillotines by the save attempt to deprive her civic rights purely for political reasons. No sooner the Warrant was issued to the said Commissioners to inquire into the allegations set out in the Warrant than Ms Bandaranaike filed an application for Writ of prohibition in the Court of Appeal (bearing No. 1/78) against the Special Presidential Commission and I was instructing Attorneys H L de Silva, E D Wikramanayake and Gomin Dayasri who were Counsel in the case. The very warrant appointing the three Judges was challenged on the ground of inconsistency with certain provisions of the 1972 Constitution and the first ground was on the warrant being ultra vires the enabling law.

The prayer to the said Application of Ms Bandaranaike was for an order in the nature of a writ of prohibition against the Respondents - J C T Weeraratne, S Sharvananda and K C E de Alwis (the three Judges appointed to the Commission) from proceeding to Inquiry into acts/or omissions of Ms Bandaranaike as Prime Minister or as a Minister during the period material to, from making findings of guilt in respect of the said acts or omissions and from making recommendations as to whether she should be subject to civic disabilities by virtue of such findings of guilt. The case was argued on 16, 17, 18 and 19 October 1978 and the matter was watched by Jurists of international repute. The three Judges who heard arguments, namely Justice Wimalaratne (President of the Court of Appeal), Justice Vythialingam and Justice Colin-Thome made Order, on 9 November 1978. Ms Bandaranaike succeeded in her first ground set out in the petition and the Court in this matter held as follows:

"As the Petitioner has succeeded on the first ground set out in the Petition, we make order issuing a Writ of Prohibition on the respondents from proceeding to inquire into acts and omissions of the petitioner during the period commencing 29 May 1970 and ending 23 July 1977, from making findings of guilt in respect of the said acts and omissions, and from making recommendations under Section 9 of Law No. 7 of 1978 as to whether the Petitioner should be subject to civic disabilities by virtue of such findings of guilt."

Writ of Prohibition

The Government could not stomach this finding and J R's Cabinet was hell bent on depriving the civic rights of Ms Bandaranaike by any device. Ms Ba-

ndaranaike in the meantime appealed to the Supreme Court on the grounds she failed before the Court of Appeal and the Attorney-General filed Petition of Appeal against the most important finding of the Court of Appeal upon which finding a Writ of Prohibition was issued on the Judges of the Commission.

The then Prime Minister R Premadasa made a special statement in Parliament on 10 November 1978 in respect of the Court of Appeal Judgement on application for writ against the Special Presidential Commission which statement contained inter-alia.

The ground on which the Court of Appeal held with the Petitioner was that the Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry Law No. 7 of 1978, did not specifically provide for investigation into matters arising prior to the enactment of the Law, viz 10 February 1978. In the view of the Government the debate in Parliament on the Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry Law made it clear that it was in respect of matters prior to the enactment of the Law that the Commission was to inquiry.

However, since the judgement of the Court of Appeal has held otherwise, the Government has decided to enact legislation to make the intention of Parliament, which passed this Law without a division, unmistakably clear to enable the Special Presidential Commission to continue with the inquiry into the matters referred to it.

The Deputy Speaker did not permit any comment on the Statement made by Mr Premadasa despite the request of V N Navaratnam. True to the determination of the UNP Government and more specially to the special interest and anxiety of Prime Minister Premadasa the Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry (Special Provisions) Act No. 4 of 1978 was passed in Parliament and it has been certified on 22 February 1978. No doubt, President J R Jayewardene would have given all his blessings towards this exercise and it is a shameful blot on the legal history of the country that a Parliament in effect wrote off or annulled or declared null and void a unanimous Judgement of a Court. Nothing constitutional or otherwise debarred the UNP in its attempt to deprive the civic rights of Ms Bandaranaike who they knew would come back to office in the very next election after 1977.

The Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry (Special Provisions) Bill after its passage through the Parliament entered the Statute Book. The Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry (Special Provisions) Act No. 4 of 1978 when it was released by the Government Printer evoked serious doubts in the minds of several in that a new Section 21A appeared to have been introduced. The Section 21A reads as follows:

"The provisions of this law and any warrant issued under the provisions of this law shall be so interpreted and given full force and effect in order that any Commission shall have full authority, power and jurisdiction to inquire into the conduct of any Prime Minister, Minister or other Public Officer."

The effect is that no Court will have the jurisdiction to hear or entertain any application seeking any Writ of Prohibition against the Commission. The Commissioners thus became a law unto themselves with the legal assurance that they could continue unperturbed and undisturbed in the investigations. What an insult to justice!

The matter was considered at length by the opposition MP's and on 4 December 1978, the then Leader of the Opposition A Amirthalingam took majority of those in the House by surprise when he stated:

Mysterious Section

"Mr Speaker, before you get on to the Business of the House, as I mentioned to you in Chambers I want to draw the attention of this House to a rather mysterious section - Section 8 - that appears in the Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry (Special Provisions) Act No. 4 of 1978.

The Section as it appears in the Act, which is purported to have been passed by this honourable House, introduces a new Section 21A to the original Act. But I have looked into the Bill that was tabled in this House Clause 8 or any other clause of that Bill does not introduce a new Section 21A.

I have also checked up Hansard of 20 November. In the Committee stage proceedings on this Bill, at no stage was any amendment introduced to add a new Section to the original Act numbered 21A. In fact, Clause 8 of the amending Bill was passed as it stood in the Committee Stage according to the Hansard.

The question of how this new Section 8 came into the Act gives rise to very disturbing and very grave misgivings in the minds of Hon Members with regard to whether the laws that this House passes are ultimately enforced in the way in which they are passed in this House. That is a very serious matter.

I want this whole matter to be gone into because I find that there is no record anywhere of a new Section 21A having been introduced. In my capacity as Leader of the Opposition in this honourable House, I want to draw your attention to this very serious state of affairs, and I would request you to get the Secretary General of Parliament to go into this matter, check it up and submit a report to you, and through you to this House, as to how this has happened."

Evidence

The entirety of the above is reproduced for its importance for the reason that the available evidence at that time was indicative of this mysterious Section not having been spoken of or passed by the Parliament even in the Committee stage. The argument of Mr Premadasa was that the amendments were moved by the Minister of Trade and Shipping. He further said that until the Committee Stage was over the Government can move amendments and all amendments were handed over to the Hon Minister of Trade and Shipping. Very strangely on 6 December 1978 Prime Minister Premadasa making a statement in Parliament on the same matter said:

"I presented the amending Bill on 20 November and made my speech introducing the Bill. After that I went to my office in this building. Then I was told that a person known to me was keen to meet me to convey some very important information. I asked him to come, and he made available to me a copy of another writ application which I was told the Hon Member for Attanagalla had filed in the Supreme Court that very day."

He went on to state that he went through the copy of the writ application filed by Ms Bandaranaike and gave specific instructions to the Attorney-General that all loopholes must be closed so that nobody could go through them, not even Ms Bandaranaike, because the Government had decided that the Special Presidential Commission should function. He further stated that it was his duty to see that the law was so framed that the Commission would be able to proceed without any hindrance and he asked the Attorney-General and the Legal Draftsman to draft the necessary amendments to prevent such a situation again.

What a disgraceful abuse of the so-called power to destroy a political opponent in the name of the so-called decent Parliamentary democracy!

Make no mistake of the fact that the Amending Bill was presented to parliament on 20 November 1978 and Amirthalingham's disclosure was on 4 December 1978. What do all these indicate? It was a blood thirst to hound out Ms Bandaranaike from the Parliament. However, the so-called amendment, it

initiation, the absence of evidence of introducing a new Section 21A afore- referred to a strange visit to the Prime Minister's Office by someone to hand over a copy of the writ application filed again would be judged by the posterity in their correct perspectives which no doubt would be stinking.

Two options were available to Ms Bandaranaike. One was to bring a vote of no confidence on the Government in the context of the available evidence including the tape. In fact a vote of no confidence motion was drafted. However, on other advice a motion for a Select Committee was opted for. Speaker Bakir Markar refused the application for a Select Committee.

Incidentally the first amendment to the 1978 Constitution was in respect of the Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry (Special Provisions) Act wherein it was argued that it is improper for the Judges of a lower Court (Court of Appeal) to issue a Writ of Prohibition on Judges of the Supreme Court.

Now that recourse to the law was denied to Ms Sirimavo Bandaranaike, activities were set in motion and Ms Bandaranaike went before the Special Presidential Commission on 7 May 1980.

Everybody expected a long drawn out trial which according to some cynics was going to be a mock trial. It is only the lawyers of Ms Bandaranaike and the children of Ms Bandaranaike knew that she was not going to give evidence before the Commission but to make a statement. This was kept a secret as Ms Bandaranaike apprehended that she may not get the opportunity to read out the entire statement. Her statement evoked international interest and her statement is historic. Her statement should necessarily find a special place in the Hansard of 17 April 1996 her birthday on which day a Bill will be passed in Parliament to erase off the infamy caused to her by the monstrous piece of legislation to deprive her of her civic rights. In her statement she stated inter-alia as follows:

Humiliation

"Having regard to all these matters I have reasonable grounds to believe that my participating in the proceedings of this Commission will serve no useful purpose except to give the UNP an opportunity of humiliating me in the same way that the Government's Lawyers sought to denigrate me and my family and indeed everybody else who have fallen foul of the Government. There will begin another carnival of calumny which will be given full publicity in the Government newspapers and then broadcast over the State Radio. I shall not be a willing party to such humiliation and revival of that disgraceful exhibition even if it means the end of my political career. It will be an insult to the people of this country whose Prime Minister I have had the distinguished honour to be. I have always accepted the judgement of the people without bitterness or rancour. If at a fairly held election it is their wish and decision that I should not lead this country again I shall certainly accept that but I shall not bow down to the machination and ruthless desires of this Government which seeks to destroy me politically and destroy democracy in this country. Even though courts of the land have been barred from giving me relief I shall take this issue before the people who will ultimately decide our destiny."

Not a Fair Trial

"I do not honestly believe that in the circumstances which I have stated, it will be possible for me to have a fair trial and a fair opportunity of exonerating myself. For these reasons I desire to inform the Honourable Members of this Commission that I do not intend to participate further in these proceedings and accordingly I am now withdrawing from it. I thank Your Honours for the patient hearing given to me."

The Commission had its own ex-parte Inquiry and found her guilty of the so-called charges set out below:

Allegations

(1) Did seek to circumvent and/or defeat the purposes of the Land Reform Law No. 1 of 1972, alienating the shares which were owned by you and your daughter Miss Chandrika Dias Bandaranaike in the allotments of land mentioned in Annexure "A1".

(2) Sought to alienate the allotments of agricultural land mentioned in Annexure "A2" which at the time of such purported alienation were vested in the Land Reform Commission in terms of the Land Reform Law.

(3) That by representing that an allotment of land which was occupied by G W K de Silva had vested in the Land Reform Commission you did seek the assistance of the Police and the Land Reform Commission you did seek the assistance of the Police and the Land Reform Commission to have the said occupant evicted from the said land.

(4)(a) Notwithstanding the fact that you had already made declarations to the Commissioner of Inland Revenue for the purpose of Wealth Tax in respect of the allotment of land mentioned in Annexure "A3" for the years 1969/70 and 1970/71, you did, after passage and certification of the Land Reform Law No. 1 of 1972, revise the valuations set out in the declarations in respect of the said land.

(b) By the aforementioned Act you did seek to obtain from the Land Reform Commission a monetary advantage by way of higher compensation calculated on the basis of such enhanced valuations.

(5) That, even after the conditions precedent for the continuance of a State of Emergency had ceased to exist, you did continue to recommend to the President that such conditions did in fact exist and that you did thereby cause the State of Emergency to continue until it lapsed on 16 February 1977.

(6) By the aforementioned Act you did seem to suppress legitimate political opposition to you and your Government and to harass or interfere with the rights and liberties of your political opponents.

(7) Did approve of a course of action which resulted in unlawful acts which were calculated to disrupt and prevent the Satyagraha organised by the United National Party at Attanagalla in December 1973.

(8) Did cause the eviction of(a) the Rev Meetiyagoda Gunaratane and (b) the Maha Sangha Peramuna from the premises occupied by them at Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo.

(9) That whilst the Criminal Investigation Department had, on the directions of the Inspector-General of Police given in April 1976, been conducting investigations into the alleged threat on the life of the then Leader of the Opposition, J R Jayewardene, you did, on or about 26 April 1976, direct the Inspector-General of Police that no complaint made by a politician should be investigated without your permission."

She was found not guilty of Charge No. 3

Even assuming that she was guilty, though, not conceded as the findings were contrary to the rule of law how many would have been deprived of civic rights if the law was applied against the powerful UNPers who ruled the country for 17 long years.

After several happenings which no doubt is a part of history, Ms Bandaranaike's civic rights were stripped on 16 October 1980 but really the debate went on until the early hours of 17 October 1980. ●

ELECTION LEAVES INDIA AT CROSS-ROADS

by T N Gopalan

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, a veteran leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the new Prime Minister of India. At the time of going to press, that is. For no one knows how long his government will survive. Many observers believe that he will not be able to survive even one Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament) session.

When sworn in as the eleventh prime minister of India on 16 May, Vajpayee had a daunting task before him - President Shankar Dayal Sharma had asked him to prove that he commanded a majority on the floor of the House.

Well, he might have been invited to have the first shot at India's top job on the ground that his BJP is the largest single party in the new Lok Sabha - it has 161 seats and with its known allies like the even more fanatical Shiv Sena it could perhaps mop up 34 more seats. But the bare minimum required for a simple majority in the 537-member House (as of now) means 269 seats - evidently the BJP is in no position to touch that magic figure on 16 May.

Given the secular predilections or professions or pretensions of most other political parties represented in the Lok-Sabha, it looks extremely uncertain whether the first BJP Government in Indian history will remain in power for more than a fortnight. The Congress spokesman V N Gadgil contemptuously described the Vajpayee regime as an eight-day wonder.

Mr Deve Gowda, the Karnataka Chief Minister, already elected as the leader of the National Front(NF)- Left Front(LF)- and regional parties described as the Third Force could be asked to try his hand next. The ousted Congress still led by the outgoing Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has pledged its support to the Third Force Front.

But that is all into the future. What matters now is that the recently concluded general election has produced a hung parliament - with no party commanding an absolute majority on its own. Regional parties have mushroomed in many corners. Coalition governments will be the order of the day. The country is very much at the cross-roads.

Never in the past have any election proved so indecisive, with not a single clear winner anywhere in sight.

The Indian National Congress (INC) has been badly mauled but the BJP, swearing by the Hindutva, its own version of the Hindu world-view, is nowhere near even the 200-mark. It could notch up only 161 seats against the INC tally of 136 seats.

The so-called National Front-Left Front allies, the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and the like garnered around 117 seats while the DMK, the Thamizh Maanila Congress (TMC), the Telugu Desam Party (Chandrababu Naidu Group), the Bahujan Samaj Party (of the Dalits and the most backward castes in the northern belt) and such other minor groupings accounted for more than 80 seats, the latter category clearly poised to play a key role in the future scheme of things at the Centre.

The country looks set to undergo some troubled times, with the Congress almost wiped out in many states and no other party voted in to take its place, the hung Parliament does seem to have ominous portents.

As mentioned earlier the BJP might be thwarted from its attempts to rule the country. But the Deve Gowda-led coalition of disparate forces that might then get the opportunity form the government could prove fragile and come unstuck in a matter of months.

A fresh round of elections could result. What would the people do then? Plump back for the Congress or back the BJP, giving either of them an absolute majority? Or will the results be even more fractured next time round and the various regional combines emerge more powerful than ever, spelling danger to the very integrity of the nation? All these questions defy a categorical answer at the moment.

The virtual decimation of the Congress under Mr Narasimha Rao is the most interesting outcome of these elections. The so-called National Party which won the country its independence and which has had an almost uninterrupted reign of nearly five decades (barring some interregnum a couple of times, once in 1977- 80 and another in 1989-91) is in tatters now.

In a small state like Orissa on the eastern coast it was able to sweep the polls, bagging 16 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats from the State and winning 22 seats from Andhra Pradesh, cashing in on the split in the Telugu Desam Party following the death of its charismatic founder, N T Rama Rao. Everywhere else it came a cropper.

In Utara Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab the Congress was almost blanked out - though in Rajasthan it did reasonably well - in all these states falling in the north. It was an equally miserable story in Maharasthra where the BJP-Shiv Sena combine bagged 33 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats at stake, though in Gujarat the Congress managed to pick up six of 26 seats thanks to the infighting in the BJP there. It lost out in Kerala and stamped out of existence in states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the south.

The BJP still remains confined to the north and west, but it has breached the citadel of Lalloo Pradad Yadav (Bihar) and picked up a few seats in Karnataka.

But so strongly it has consolidated itself wherever it has some roots in the North and the West, this reactionary communal party is sure to cast its long and deadly shadow over the polity for a long time to come.

At the moment by projecting Vajpayee as its leader the party is seeking to reassure everyone around that it has no evil intentions, that it would not run amok but be very accommodative.

Unlike Mr Lal Kishen Advani, the Party President, Vajpayee is considered the moderate face of the BJP, not raucous, not doctrinaire, but much less aggressive and much more acceptable to all sections. Like you know, he is supposed to have regretted the demolition of the Babri Masjid whereas Advani had virtually presided over this monstrous operation.

Realising the all round outrage caused by the demolition and the general unhappiness with some of the more militant postures of the party, the Sangh Parivaar seised upon the hawala affair with which Advani is also linked to effectively sideline him and project Vajpayee as its prime ministerial candidate.(Sangh Parivaar is the omnibus term used in Indian Journalism to refer to any and every Hindu fundamentalist fringe, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) being the mother outfit and Parivaar roughly translates into brigade).

True to form and desperate to form the government, the BJP is making compromises down the line - it will not insist on a uniform civil code or on the abrogation of Art 370 of the constitution (conferring a special status on Kashmir) or do anything precipitous on the Ayodhya front or for that matter roll back the liberalisation policies and so on. All this is an attempt to make the alliance with the BJP that much more palatable for the various regional groupings if not for the Congress itself.

Already a party like the Samata from Bihar and led by fire-brand socialist, George Fernandes has hitched its wagon to the BJP's star, making light of the latter's fundamentalist inclinations. The Samata actually fought as an ally of the BJP and worsted the Janata Dal. Whether such parties as the DMK and the TMC or the TDP would not mind hobnobbing with the BJP remains to be seen.

It is inconceivable that a party like the DMK which prides itself on its Dravidian origins and opposes the Hindu social hierarchy or the TMC lead by a man like Moopanar whose secular credentials are above reproach or the TDP which has to be wary of antagonising the Muslim vote-bank could support the BJP. Right now they have joined hands with the Third Force of the NF-LF-Janatha Dal, but will the lure of office leave them untouched?

(Incidentally the TDP (Naidu Group), led by NTR's son-in-law, has triumphed in AP bagging 17 seats and wiped out the Lakshmi Parvathi faction, thus forestalling the possible emergence of a Jayalalitha clone in that state.

In a most cynical association, the Shironmani Akali Dal, a Sikh fundamentalist grouping which came up trumps in Punjab, has joined hands with the BJP. How could the two parties, catering to two mutually conflicting constituencies stick together? The fanaticism of one is sure to inflame the other.

So also observers are viewing with concern the coming back to power of the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam. While on the positive side, it could be said to reflect the Assamese aspirations, it is also anti-Muslim and against most other ethnic groups in the state. The North East being a very sensitive region and being on the boil most of the time, any brinkmanship by the AGP could have disastrous consequences. Mercifully for now, for various reasons, the AGP has decided to stick to the Third Force, but for how long is open to question.

The BJP represents the ugliest facet of Hinduism, contradicting its essential catholicity and tolerance. Already in Maharashtra where BJP-Shiv Sena combine is in power, none squirms when someone like Thackeray indulges in his most outrageous Muslim or Dalit bashing outpourings. The entire political discourse of the nation could undergo a disturbing change if the BJP remains in power and social tensions would grow. From now on it is a fight between the centripetal forces led by the BJP and the centrifugal ones represented by the regional parties. What will happen to the Indian Union? Will a genuine federal structure emerge or the country be torn asunder by communal and caste clashes? One has to wait and see. ●

JAYALALITHA HUMBLED AT LAST

T N Gopalan

"Nandavanthil or aandi - avan naalaaru maadhamaik kuyavanai vendi konduvandhaan oru thondi - athai koothadi koothadi pottudaithaandi."

That is an oft-quoted sithar song which literally pokes fun at the plight of a wretchedly poor chap who coaxes a pot for free from a potter only to be carried away at his new-found fortune and execute jigs endlessly - the pot is broken in the process.

That favourite metaphor for self-destruction is perhaps most appropriate in illustrating the tragedy of Jayalalitha Jayaram in a most stunning debacle in the state's electoral history, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has been almost completely wiped out - it will have merely three members in the 234-strong Tamil Nadu assembly. The party supremo Jayalalitha herself has been worsted at Bargur by a margin of over 8,000 votes by a little-known DMK candidate.

It was a tornado like never before. The DMK-Thamizh Maanila Congress (TMC) swept everything before it, the front ending up with around 225 seats.

All the 39 Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian parliament) seats also were bagged by the front blanking out the AIADMK from the scheme of things at New Delhi for the first time in its 14-year-long history.

The 3-seat tally is of course the worst ever humiliation to be suffered by the party floated by the late matinee idol MGR and Jayalalitha is the first incumbent Chief Minister to be defeated in an election in the last three decades - the last one to meet with such a fate was Mr M Bhaktavatchalam of the Congress in 1967.

None of her cabinet colleagues nor the ever-loyal speaker, Sedapatti R Muthiah have been spared the voter's fury.

The senior-most among the Dravidian leaders, that permanent No. 2 in the state cabinet (irrespective of whether the DMK or the AIADMK is in power), the "mobile university" V R Nedunchezhian was trounced by over 50,000 votes in Theni in the Madurai district.

Almost all the AIADMK-Cong-I candidates lost by margins of 20,000 votes and more.

Such was the electorate's wrath against the Jayalalitha regime and their determination to usher in a new order that the so-called third, fourth and fifth fronts were also decimated, none was allowed to come in the way of the DMK-TMC triumph or split the anti-Jaya votes which could have indirectly helped the discredited lady to at least put up a good show even if not to remain in power.

The much-talked about Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) led by the so-called Tiger-votary V Gopalasamy (Vai Go) came a cropper. Vai Go himself was defeated both in the Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies he had contested from.

The other party with a lot of promise, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), could retrieve hardly three seats for itself.

The self-proclaimed anti-Jaya crusader Dr Subramaniam Swamy and his cohorts including former IAS official Ms Chandralekha also fell by the wayside.

While most of the psephological predictions which flooded the Indian newspapers during the run-up to the polls certainly proved wrong in the matter of detail when it came to the scene in many other states, as far as Tamil Nadu was concerned their predictions proved right to the T.

"Jayalalitha is the most hated Chief Minister in the country," the opinion polls had said, "Corruption is the single most important issue before the voters...The DMK-TMK-front is sure to coast to a land-slide victory." Even the journalists including this writer who traversed the length and breadth of this Tamil country found it difficult to believe that Jayalalitha had been so completely alienated from the masses that the AIADMK would end up with less than 20 seats for the Assembly and a couple in the Lok-Sabha, figures projected by the opinion polls.

"There is widespread resentment against the corrupt and unresponsive regime, yes. The AIADMK-Cong-I front might lose out to the rival combine. But there are such imponderables as loyalty to MGR's memory, to his two-leaves symbol, whatever is left of Jayalalith's own charisma, the split in the anti-AIADMK votes and so on. Jaya- lalitha could still put up a good show even if she will have to cool her heels in the opposition rows," this correspondent had written in a despatch to a local newspaper. And such was the general impression among the journalists who, ill-equipped to scientifically gather and analyse data, failed to perceive a wave coming.

Actor Rajnikanth who was indubitably instrumental in Jayalalitha's downfall had reportedly predicted a definite route for her.

Indeed the people have overwhelmingly responded to his call, in his only election campaign telecast, to "launch a silent revolution through the ballot box and throw out this corrupt and autocratic regime."

When he declared war on her ten months ago he said caustically, "If she is voted to power again, not even God can save the people of this state".

Of course no tears are shed anywhere over her present predicament. She has antagonised almost every section of public opinion, the press and the middle-classes particularly, through her overweening arrogance and unrestrained loot of the treasury besides systematic acts of terrorism unleashed by the goon gangs patronised by her minions on the opposition.

That she should have been defeated in Bargur in the Dharmapuri district in north western Tamil Nadu is in itself a case in point.Ever since it was carved out in 1987 Bargur had been returning only the AIADMK candidates to the Assembly. Even in the 1989 elections, held after the demise of MGR and when all the established parties went it alone, it was a candidate of the Jaya-faction of the AIADMK who had carried the day. And in 1991 Jayalalitha had triumphed by over 37,000 votes from the very same Bargur.

For the lady who was initiated into politics way back in 1982 by MGR during an AIADMK conference at Cuddalore and who kept pampering her right through, the latest developments should indeed come as a body-blow. Despite the trials and tribulations in her own personal life, her political career had always been on the upswing.

She had been able to overcome a jealous MGR's own tentative efforts to sideline her, beat back her detractors in the AIADMK and capture the party. If blanking out the DMK in 1989 Lok Sabha polls, with the help of Rajiv Gandhi, was a high-point in her career, her triumph in the 1991 general elections proved heady for her, reinforcing her belief in her own invincibility.

When she continued to win in the by-elections too, even when she was fighting on her own and amid adverse media reports on her omissions and commissions, she should have become evermore complacent. However, sensing some antipathy among the public, she swallowed her pride, sent feelers to Prime Minister and Congress President Narasimha Rao for revival of the alliance between the two parties and succeeded in her efforts on this score. She should have believed that the way was now clear for a second term in office.

But she had failed to take into account Rajnikanth's own charisma, the mobilising power of Congress leader G K Moopanar and the magnitude of public hostility to her which was once again turning into goodwill for the DMK.

Rajni fans in their thousands swung into action and worked like mad for the DMK-led front and Moopanar's desertion had left the Rao-Congress empty.

Even during the campaign, Jayalalitha attracted only moderate crowds whereas Karunanidhi had to virtually swim his way trough a sea of humanity almost everywhere. Even a man like Moopanar, not known as a charismatic personality, was attracting more crowds than Jayalalitha in some places. Many of the AIADMK candidates including Nedunchezhian and Sedapatti Muthiah could not even enter their constituencies for canvassing for many days.

Arrogance, self-indulgence, corruption, terror tactics, throttling of the opposition inside and outside the assembly, disdain for the judiciary; any and all of these could have worked against her. Taking off from her mentor, her head swollen by some easy victories quite early in her career, she should have thought being arrogant, aloof, unaccountable would not essentially affect her "vote-bank" so ..... persisted with her blunders and allowed her confidante, Sasikala and her clan to continue with their binge. But she failed to realise there had been a streak of humanism in MGR that she miserably lacked. Besides he had always been pragmatic enough not to antagonise his Congress ally.

For the first time since the MGR walked out on him in 1972 Karunanidhi has comprehensively defeated the AIADMK. Even in 1989 when he had won his victory was attributed to the split in the AIADMK and sure enough he was worsted in the subsequent Lok Sabha elections. At long last he has overcome the aversion of rural folks towards him, an aversion ensuing from his own depredations in 1971-76. "Her fall is a lesson to every politician," he said on the people's verdict. One hopes he has well and truly learnt his lesson. ●

Power Crisis Critical

Sri Lanka's state-run power utility, the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) could extend daily power cuts to eight hours from thecurrent four starting late-May because of the prolonged drought,according to a senior official

"We are reviewing the situation daily, but the four-hourpower cut will stay until May 20," Neil Perera, deputy chairmanof the CEB told the press. "If it becomes critical, there is the possibility of extending the power cut to eight hours," he said.

CEB chairman Dr Leslie Herath on 15 May described the situation as critical. Weather officials say the southwest monsoon is expected to break at the end of May, heralding a month of solid rain.

Power cuts were introduced after the failure of the winter northeast monsoon which is relied on to fill the country's hydropower reservoirs. More than 80 percent of Sri Lanka's energy comes from hydropower.

"We are reaching a critical period now," General Anuruddha Ratwatte, Sri Lanka's minister of power and energy, told a press conference 15 May at the Sapugaskanda Power Plant. "The expected monsoon rains have let us down. We can only give electricity for 12 days with the existing water levels in the reservoirs, " he said.

Faced with the possibility of running out of hydropower in less than two weeks, there is scramble in the island to buy diesel generators, according import sources in Colombo. A company which imports American-made generators said brisk business over the past three months resulted in a 100 percent increase in sales.

"We sold over 150 units during the last three months which is up by 100 percent from the previous year," said a company spokesman who wished to remain unidentified. "During previous power crises we have had high demand, but it has been nothing like this," the spokesman told the press. He added that many of the smaller generators had been grabbed by banks and offices which have to operate during the blackout.

"We are also getting a lot of inquiries from industries which want to be self-sufficient in power. We feel this is a trend we will have to cater to in the future," the spokesman said. ●

TAMASHA AND SERIOUSNESS OF INDIAN ELECTIONS

Indian journalists proudly call it the biggest exercise of democracy in the world. The huge affair called Indian elections is as much a carnival or a tamasha, though, thanks to the strict directives of the Election Commission, the atmosphere is a little less noisy, colourful and boisterous, and more suited to the taste of the burgeoning middle classes. Even the middle classes have their superstars. Their choice is Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan, a hard-boiled Tamil B.... bureaucrat who, with his headmaster-like postures, is certainly building a countrywide constituency for himself.

In India, elections are indeed tamashas, or more seriously, farces. The fight is actually among a few autocracies, better known as political parties, who have never felt the need to elect their own supremos and office-bearers! Doubts, if any, could be cleared by finding out when the last inner-party elections were held by one's own favourite party, if any.

The economics of India's public sphere is saturated not with the rationality of a democracy, but with a hawala discourse by which big business and mafia dons collaborate to fund elections and shape the leaderships of various parties. Hawala rackets are known to drain the country's foreign exchange reserves which are being built by textile, leather and engineering exports and contributions from hardworking Indians in the Gulf. According to the Reserve Bank, Rs 28,000 crore is lost to India in terms of foreign exchange through hawala. Some transnational business houses who want to bribe Indian bureaucrats and politicians use hawala liaison networks through non-resident Indians.

With full convertibility of the rupee against the dollar in the offing, whichever type of government assumes power at the centre, hawala would no longer be a crime. Law it would be. Hence, it might become a legal activity to divert India's foreign exchange reserves towards funding of political parties running for elections!

The public sphere accommodates business houses and mafia chiefs, political dons, crude film stars, bigots, diplomats and bureaucrats, but has little time and space for ordinary citizens, shelterless and unorganised rural labour and landless rural labour, small entrepreneurs and crafts persons, working women and child labour, ecologists, culturally sensitive intelligentsia and those saintly persons who want to reform their respective religions from within. Even Union Home Secretary N N Vohra's recent report had to admit this. The parties don't have much to offer in terms of basic change.

For instance, even left parties don't speak about eradicating child labour which is particularly rampant in Tamil Nadu. Money power from "abroad" (hawala) and muscle power from within ensure that the system wouldn't even offer the usual choice between competing elites. The parties, at the middle and grassroots level, are manned by combines of dadas, meaning gangsters, and autocrats, at the top. The choice is between arbitrarily chosen candidates, most of them with dubious distinctions, especially if they are from rural areas of North India where some form of feudalism is still intact. In the ensuing clash for representing the people of their areas, their criminal rather than parliamentary abilities stand out!

Basic facilities necessary for the maintenance of a civil society like education, health care, shelter and the barest of human dignity have always taken a backseat in such an atmosphere. The result? Conditions in India have always been ripe for that revolution which never seems to occur. The revolution through the ballot, which journalists want to affirm, is like the waking of a Kumbhakarna from sleep. Only this Kumbhakarna, meaning the people, will be put to sleep after the elections! And very often like him, the people, will have to sacrifice themselves for their Ravana-like masters!

While Seshan can take some credit for initiating a debate on all of this, it must be stated that his pompous gestures have given him the status of not an umpire as he would like to feel but that of an autocrat-buffoon in the spectacle of a circus. For instance, in the 1994 Janata party case, he threatened political parties that their registration would be cancelled if they did not hold inner-party elections according to their respective constitutions. But the threat became vacuous soon.

Most stringent laws which had been made apparently to correct the flaws in the electoral system have had the opposite effect. The Anti-Defection Act, which supposedly disqualifies a legislator for switching parties, has become a handy tool in the hands of big parties for breaking smaller parties and encouraging detections in convenient instalments. The Congress(I) government at the centre led by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao managed to survive its full term, thanks to this dubious law. The courts are now full of cases which allege that the Prime Minister's confidante and selfstyled Godman. Chandra Swami, bribed legislators of smaller outfits like the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, a regional party formed to protect the rights of tribals in Eastern India, to support Narasimha Rao. The late N T Rama Rao had gone on record saying that Narasimha Rao broke his Telugu Desam parliamentary wing. The Janata Dal was broken in three instalments to sustain the Rao government.

That feudalism survives in Indian politics has been brought out by the Congress(I) and the BJP's strategy of giving party tickets to close relatives of those charged with crimes like getting payoffs from hawala racketeer Jain or protecting associates of smuggler Dawood Ibrahim. Kamal Nath, one of those charged with involvement with hawala racket payoffs, has got wife as his substitute in the electoral arena. In any case, Congress(I) and other parties have been promoting wives, husbands, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers- in-law, grandsons, granddaughters, nephews and nieces and whosoever kinsperson possible, in politics. This calls for a separate anthropological study. How can Narasimha Rao be an exception to this! His sons, Ranga Rao and Rajeswara Rao, are in the electoral arena. The only exception seems to be the country's premier ruling dynasty, the Nehru-Gandhis. Its only member contesting elections this time is Ms Maneka Gandhi, the widow of Sanjay who is estranged from the family. Apart from her famous avatar of an animal rights activist, she is a Janata Dal candidate.

With several states, including Tamil Nadu, disregarding the constitutional mandate for holding elections for local bodies, formal democracy has very little chances of regeneration and renewal at the grassroots level. Moreover, the Indian elections have no proportional representation system. This ensures that the winning party on combine, which manages to get more than 40 per cent of the votes polled (which themselves amount to at most 85 per cent of the total electorate), will walk away with more than 80 percent of the seats. The loser, with 35 per cent votes, will end up with less

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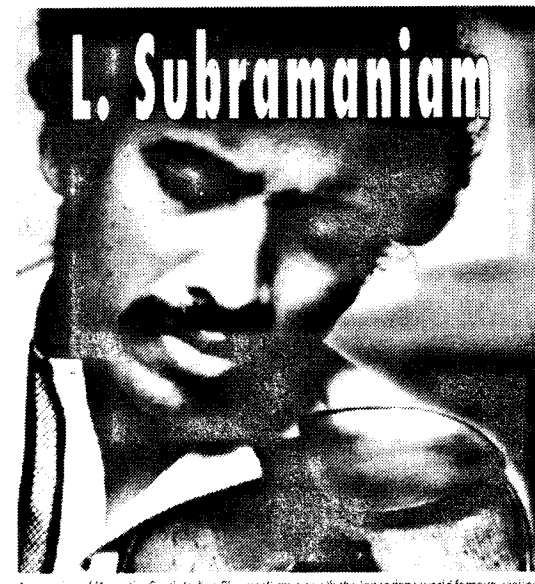

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This hopeless scenario leaves a lot of space for convenient and opportunist alliances between political parties. And the political accent is on preventing certain alliances from being forged. This strange situation had made the Congress in Tamil Nadu, which had a vote-base of about 15-18 per cent, the most sought-after party. The AIADMK or the DMK can manage to garner maximum seats only by aligning with the Congress. This also explains why the Congress(I) has split three-way in Tamil Nadu today. Each Congress group has aligned with a Dravidian outfit - DMK, AIADMK, or the PMK in an effort to garner the maximum number of seats.

Membership of the Rajya Sabha, or the Upper House whose members are elected by state legislatures biennially, can be even more hilarious. Nuclear scientist Dr Raja Ramanna, a confirmed Bangalorean, who was made Minister of State for the Defence by the National Front government of Mr V P Singh, was seen seriously stating before this house that he belonged to Uttar Pradesh. Finance Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, acknowledged as a simple-living economist-Sardar in Delhi, pretends that he hails from distant Assam to get elected to Rajya Sabha. And Janata Dal leader S R Bommai, whose entry into politics in the forties was at the behest of none-other-than the great revolutionary M N Roy, takes an oath that the lives from Orissa and gets elected to the Rajya Sabha! This strategy might be helpful in accommodating members of the intelligentsia, but leaves little scope for accountability in terms of constituency democracy.

Added to this is the spectre of powerful politicos contesting from more than one constituency. Veteran leader, Devi Lal fought last time in three places, and fortunately was defeated in two of them. BJP's prime ministerial candidate A B Vajpayee is in the fray this time for Lucknow and Gandhinagar seats; and he says that he would keep the latter seat reserved for BJP Chief L K Advani who has vowed to fight the polls after getting cleared by the court of hawala charges. Why should Gandhinagar elect him if it has to elect Advani again? No answer. Narasimha Rao wants to represent Nandyal in Andhra Pradesh, but also wants to contest from Berhampur in Orissa, just because these two constituencies have never elected non-Congress candidates so far. He promises to build new infrastructure in Berhampur, which he never did in Nandyal as a Prime Minister. Why should Nandyal or Berhampur elect a 74-year young candidate (who did not contest the 1991 elections apparently because of old age) if he does not become Prime Minister? No answer again.

Disputes continue to dog the dysfunctional electoral system a number of years after polling. Remember, the Allahabad High Court unseated Mrs Indira Gandhi a full four years after she committed corrupt practices while sweeping the 1971 elections. This court directive provoked the autocrat in her to declare the dreadful Emergency. A petition seeking to disqualify Jayalalitha as a legislator is getting heard by the Supreme Court only after five years of judicial wrangle. Of course, the Election Commission's remark that candidates should stick to the specified limits of election expenses and the Apex Court directive to political parties to file their tax returns including election expenses evoke wry smiles from politicians.

Their usual policy is to mock the system by discounting party expenditure from expenses of candidates!

The most serious of all recent judgements has been that made by the Supreme Court on Hindutva. Dismissing a petition challenging the election of Maharashtra Chief Minister Manohar Joshi, who is the confidante of Shiv Sena Chief Bal Thackeray, the Court objected to the use of religion for campaign, but went on to equate Hindutva with "Indianisation". After protests from several leftists, the Court came up with an unusual explanation of Hindutva as something which signified epitomes of Indian values like mutual respect and synthesis!

The BJP is not that fierce on its Hindutva during campaign this time. Its strategy might well pay off. Not as corrupt as the Congress, the BJP is set to emerge as the single largest party in new Parliament which would be hung. It would need support from smaller regional parties to form a government at the centre. The Babri Mosque demolition cannot be forgotten, but erstwhile socialists like former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and George Fernandes are close to the BJP now, giving it a dangerously credible look. The BJP's agenda, in the long-term, is more social than political; which means that the BJP will not hesitate to give up power to render certain irreversible changes in the country's public sphere. The BJP's pre-eminence is certainly detrimental to the pluralist cultural landscape of the Indian subcontinent. Mark these words: India may well be entering a new age of fundamentalist hegemony from which neighbours like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan are finding so difficult to get out.

To avoid this, the alternative before the Congress factions, left parties, the Janata Dal and smaller parties, which want continuation of the secular public sphere and humanist agenda, is to come together. Congress factions led by Arjun Singh (and N D Tiwari), Madhavrao Scindia and G K Moopanar might well ask for Narasimha Rao to be dumped as a precondition for unity. This may be acceptable to regional parties like DMK and at least one of the two Telugu Desam factions.

There are no dearth of candidates for prime ministership including V P Singh (though he has ruled himself out due to illness), Bihar Chief Minister Lallu Prasad Yadav and Dalit leader Ram Vilas Paswan (Janata Dal), former Kerala Chief Minister K Karunakaran, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar and Arjun Singh or Tiwari (Congress), West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and Vice-President K R Narayanan.

The feature of this year's elections is that the BJP, the Congress factions and the Janata Dal-left Front combine would not bag all the 547 Lok Sabha seats among themselves. The elections are certain to throw up a fourth cluster of smaller parties with regional, tribal and Dalit identities and radical leftist sympathies. That combine which successfully negotiates among the rest of the three clusters alone would be able to form a government which lasts at least for a while. ●

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TAMIL NADU'S MOMENT OF TRUTH

G. Ramesh

Its endgame for Chief Minister J Jayalitha. And the moment of truth for DMK President M Karunanidhi, who has fought really hard, right since the time he dropped out of a Tiruvarur school as a fourteen-year-old, until this very day when he is tasting success to head Tamil Nadu for a record fourth time in his eventful life of 72 years so far. Every recent move of his, including forging an alliance with the Tamil Maanila Congress of G K Moopanar, getting support from film star Rajnikant's fans and asking Rajnikant to campaign for the DMK- TMC combine through television, is paying off. The two other combines led by Marumalarchi DMK supremo V Gopalsamy and Pattali Makkal Katchi founder Dr S Ramadoss have not been able to position themselves successfully as an alternative to Jayalalitha's corrupt regime.

Mu Ka, as he signs in his daily column to his "younger brothers" in party organ Murasoli, is a politician of unique enigma in Indian public life. His knowledge of traditional Tamil is sharp, but that has not earned him a place among India's sophisticated cultural elite. (He was seen presenting his commentary on Tirukkural to Rajnikant who came to his Gopalapuram house to greet him. He is an agitator par excellence in churning out film scripts critical of existing social values, but this has been missed by those who militate against him. He is a party organiser of extraordinary strength, but those who leave the DMK tend to underestimate him. His grasp of recent social history of Tamil nadu is superb, but that does not prevent him from being accused as an enemy of those very sections for whom he had toiled. For his critics, his shortcomings are always more than his credentials and achievements.

Perhaps the most hated leader be those among the English media whose mother tongue is Tamil, Mu Ka has managed to crawl back every time he was dismissed from the top post. Compare this with Jayalalitha's dismal one-term record of losing on excellent 60 per cent plus majority and the enormous goodwill from a media which had been more than willing to support her.

In Jayalalitha's exist from office, Tamil Nadu's moment of truth has arrived. She is none of what Mu Ka is all about. Jayalalitha is all about Tamil Nadu's fad for convent English, her obsession with foster-sister Sasikala and her family's fortunes rather than the state's intractable problems like water shortage, caste riots and unemployment. Her facination for helicopter hopping within the city, her decisions to get a film city, a wildlife sanctuary and an interstate transport corporation in Tamil Nadu and a street in United States named after herself, her party men's pathetic attempts to genuflex before her and thrash her critics with hockey sticks or acid bulbs, and so on.

As the first phase of polling got over, the Indian Express published a news item that six trucks with sealed containers left her Poes Garden residence here for her Jedimetla Palace in Hyderabad. What would they have contained? All of Sasikala's loot, or speech copies delivered by Jayalalitha in the last five years? Nobody knows. But everyone reading the opinion polls knows of her impending defeat. In the winner-takes-all arena of Tamil Nadu politics, she has to tackle the electorate's reverse swing.

During her month-long, 3,760 km- long, helicopter-hopping campaign tour, she saw the crowds thinning out. They only wanted to see her foster-sister but were disappointed to see Sasikala not with jewellery. Some AIADMK candidates including Finance Minister V R Nedunchezhian and Assembly Speaker Sedapathi R Muthiah were turned away by electorates. The rump Congress(I) owing allegiance to Narasimha Rao and TNCC(I) President Kumari Anandhan is in disarray in the state. Notwithstanding all this, Jayalalitha has braved on, hoping to retain her Bagur seat, and skipped the city, a DMK bastion, during the last leg of her campaign tour. ●

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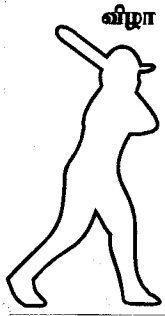

இவ் வரலாற்றுப் பெருமைமிகு விழாவிற்கு அனைத்துத் தமிழ் மக்களும் வருகை தந்து நமது விளையாட்டு வீரர்களை ஊக்குவிப்பதோடு சோதனையும் வேதனையும் தமிழினத்தை எதிர்நோக்கும் இவ்வேளையில், நமது தேசிய இன ஒருமைப்பாட்டையும், உணர்வுகளையும் அகில உலகிற்கு ஒன்றிணைந்து உறுதியாக வெளிப்படுத்துவோமாக.

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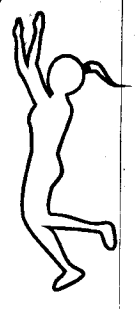

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THE LOVE TO TEMPT THE FURY OF THE GODS

By Ayaz Amir

There is a strange malady which afflicts Pakistani rulers sooner or later. Just when everything seems to be going fine for them they must do something completely queer to tempt the fury of the gods. It is not too long ago that Mian Nawaz Sharif, while enjoying a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, forfeited his prime ministership when he entered into a wholly avoidable conflict with the then President, Ghulam, Ishaq Khan. If Nawaz Sharif's impetuosity had been the result of considered policy, something still might have been said for it. But all the evidence suggests that he and his advisers stumbled into a confrontation whose consequences they probably lacked the imagination to foresee. Nor was the doughty President much better advised. In the twilight of his career, he lived up to what Shakespeare says in As you Like It that in the last stage of his life, a man returns to the helplessness of childhood.

The same malady has now struck the present rulers. Just when their government looked secure, with the Muslim League trying to figure out a strategy for itself and the MQM on the run in Karachi, they had to manufacture a crisis with the superior judiciary.

Packing the high courts of Punjab and Sindh with appointees whose political affiliations shone brighter than their legal ability was bad enough. But what prompted the authorities to give a personal spin to a judicial problem? When the petition filed by Rawalpindi's maverick lawyer, Mr Wahabul Khairi, questioning the manner in which the PPP government had appointed high court judges was accepted for regular hearing by the Chief Justice, Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, the government was incensed. Here was a chief justice who had been elevated over the heads of several colleagues senior to him. What's more, by his appointment a precedent observed since the days of Justice Munir had been broken. And yet this same chief justice was now exercising his mind and acting in an independent manner. The inference was clear. The government and its law officers expected the Chief Justice of Pakistan to behave like an SHO and when, to the government's amazement but to the delight of most Pakistanis interested in the supremacy of the judiciary, he did not, the government was angry.

The government's two-pronged response was worthy of any neighbourhood tough. First a lawyer whose ties to the ruling party were no secret filed a petition in the Peshawar High Court challenging the appointment of Justice Sajjad Ali Shah as Chief Justice of Pakistan on the grounds that he was not the senior most judge of the Supreme Court. This petition has still to be decided.

Secondly, the Sindh government, which in Pakistan today presents the most shining example that there is provincial autonomy, put the heat on Justice Sajjad, Ali shah's son-in-law, an employee of the provincial government. His house in Hyderabad was raided by the police and he was suspended from service. So much for political tact and propriety.

The logic which led to this action can easily be reconstructed. In the eyes of the government, Justice Sajjad Ali Shah's fault was not that he was perceived as an adversary. Adversaries who cannot be bent and harsh realities that cannot be changed the Prime Minister has learnt to suffer, this being a hallmark of her hard-won pragmatism, Justice Sajjad. Ali Shah, however, was behaving independently when instead he should have been showing his gratitude. Her government, therefore, tried to behave with the Chief Justice of Pakistan exactly as it would have dealt with one of its difficult minions: by sending the police after his son-in-law which is a page out of the book of standard Pakistani criminology where, if a chief suspect cannot be hauled up, his next of kin is.

While engaged in these tricks the government seemed to forget that it had an important law case on its hands which if lost could lead to a serious crisis.

At first the Attorney-General, Qazi Jamil (who, apart from any other sin, is being blamed for poisoning the Prime Minister's ears and leading her down a destructive path) procrastinated, not appearing before the Supreme Court on one pretext or another. When he finally was left with no option but to open the government case, it became painfully obvious that the Chief Law Officer of the land was ill-prepared for what can safely be considered as the most important case of his life. But all this is water under the bridge. The important thing is that in the Judges case the Supreme Court has spoken and in doing so has administered a stinging reprimand (to put it no stronger than that) to a government that was getting to be too sure of itself.

In putting the stamp of its interpretation on Articles 177 and 193 of the Constitution - articles which relate to the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts - the Supreme Court has altered the relationship between the Executive and the Judiciary by making it well impossible for the President to appoint judges to the superior courts in opposition to the wishes of the concerned chief justices.

Furthermore, the powers hitherto exercised, and frequently misused, by the executive authority to harass if not chastise members of the superior judiciary, and also to breed a sense of insecurity in them, have either been done away with completely or sharply curtailed. Thus the practice of appointing acting chief justices has been circumscribed by the condition that within 30 days a vacancy must be filled. No ad hoc judges can be appointed against permanent vacancies in the Supreme Court. A high court judge can be transferred to another high court in the public interest but not as a punishment (which presumably means that a transfer will be subject to the consent of the chief justice concerned or the judge in question).

In deciding this the Supreme Court has declared that Article 209 of the Constitution, which guarantees security of tenure being part of the original 1973 Constitution, has precedence over Article 203-C which is a legacy of military rule.

As has been commented upon widely, if this argument is accepted (As it has to be since it is the highest court which is making it), the door is flung open for striking down the other additions to the Constitution made by General Zia-ul-Haq and later provided blanket cover by Parliament through the passage of the Eighth Amendment. Conceivably, this could re-open a host of constitutional issues hitherto considered settled.

The question, however, can legitimately be asked whether overriding a constitutional provision is a legitimate exercise of judicial interpretation or an encroachment into the field of law making which lies outside the competence of the Supreme Court.

Of more immediate relevance to the government is the fate of its judicial appointees who have come under a cloud because of this judgment. Unless confirmed/regularised by permanent chief

(Continued on next page)

Tigers Call for Third Party Mediation

The LTTE has in a statement explained its official position in regard to peace talks and mediation. The statement dated 30 April issued in London said:

"In view of ambiguous reports appearing in the International Media with regard to LTTE's position on peace talks and mediation, the International Secretariat of the LTTE wishes to clarify its stand on this matter.

The LTTE is committed to a negotiated political settlement.

In view of the existing hostility and mistrust between the parties in conflict, we are of opinion that a third party mediation is vital to promote the negotiating process.

The LTTE wishes to emphasise the creation of a congenial atmosphere as a necessary condition for the conduction of peace talks. Meaningful talks with Sri Lankan Government cannot be held under the constraints of war, aggression and military occupation of Tamil Lands.

The Sri Lankan Government is presently engaged in a war of aggression aimed to occupy the Tamil homeland, subjugate the Tamil population and to impose a military administration.

This approach will further aggravate the conflict, prolong the war and negate the possibilities of peace. Therefore, we wish to emphasise that cessation of hostilities and de escalation of the conflict are necessary conditions for creating congenial atmosphere for peace process. The LTTE cannot participate in a political dialogue unless Sri Lanka puts an end to military aggression and occupation and withdraw troops from the occupied territories in the Jaffna peninsula.

We urge the International Community to use their good offices to impress upon Sri Lanka government to give up the military option and create conditions of normality conducive to peace process and negotiated political settlement." ●

(Continued from page 27)

justices, their appointments are void in terms of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Already the Karachi and Lahore bar associations, displaying an enthusiasm which accords ill with the restraint usually associated with the legal profession, have raised the banners of revolt against these unfortunate souls. None of this can please the government which is still trying to shape its response to a judgment which has been no less than a judicial bombshell for it.

The critical question, therefore, is whether the rulers will have the sense to moderate their reactions and make the best of a verdict delivered by someone who has turned out to be their Becket or whether they will make life difficult for themselves by locking horns with the judiciary and giving the legal profession, which at least in this country is no more level-headed than any other, a pretext to raise a nationwide rumpus? Another consideration could also be kept in mind. For a polity still trying to find the golden mean, judicial intemperance can be as unwholesome in its effects as executive excesses. If governments, and this government especially, have been appointing political favourites to judicial offices, the high priests of the judiciary must doubly guard against the temptation of judicial favouritism.

In any case, for the smooth functioning of the affairs, of the federation a civilised working relationship has to exist between the executive and judicial branches. If it does not, what is supposed to be a system of checks and balances can easily degenerate into mindless obstructionism. In such an eventuality the public interest suffers. At this juncture, therefore, it is not just the rulers and their law minions on trial but also the superior lights of the judiciary. ●

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The Little Magazine and Serious Writing in Thamil

by S.Sivasegaram

The development of creative writing in Thamil has been closely linked with periodicals, which have done much to encourage reading and played a positive role, at least for a short period in the history of modern Thamil literature, to increase social awareness. Periodicals have always had to come to terms with conflicts of interests such as those between commercial success and good taste and between personal or institutional interest and public interest. Not many publishers have been successful in striking the happy medium and, in the present era of the glorification of self interest and commercial success at any cost, many periodicals have compromised their standards simply to ensure economic viability. I never believed that magazines like *Kalhi* and *Aanandha Vihadan* were committed to high literary standards, but good writers have contributed to them. Today, they are competing with *Kumudham* to lower their standards to levels unimaginable thirty or forty years ago. Even *Kalaimahal*, founded by Ki. Vaa. Jah-annaathan, who was highly respected for his commitment to high literary standards, has abandoned much of what *Ki. Vaa. Ja.* stood for.

The current Thamil cultural climate, especially that in Thamilnaadu, characterised by the obscenity that passes for the Thamil movie, has shifted much of the burden of upholding not merely good literary standards but also serious and socially responsible discussion to the shoulders of those associated with alternative magazines, better known as 'little magazines'. Alternative magazines are not new to Thamil, but what makes a little magazine is still disputed. Magazines like *Manikkodi* were aimed at a narrower readership than any popular magazine of its day, and *Thaamarai*, founded by the late Pa. Jievaanantham, was serious in its content as was *Kalaimahal*. There have been other titles like *Sarasvathi* edited by Vijayabaaskaran and *Thiepam* edited by Naa. Paarththasaarathi which were serious literary magazines that were sold at news stands dealing in quality magazines. One should also not forget the contributions of Thaamoetharan who persistently published a science monthly, *Kalaikkathir* in Thamil for several decades and Vaanamaamalai who edited *Aaraichchi* a serious journal in Thamil for research in social sciences. But none of these were the kind of little magazine of today, which is characterised not only by its limited readership and seriousness of content but also by the methods used for reaching that readership.

Market forces have determined that anything serious or of social value was doomed to be a commercial failure so that it was the little magazine that un-

dertook the task of dealing with a wide variety of subjects that the mainstream media and popular magazines were, for commercial reasons, reluctant even to consider with the seriousness that they deserved. The little magazines of Thamilnaadu dealt with literary criticism, international literature, modern theatre, alternative technology and medicine, modern philosophy and many other topics. It should not be surprising that free verse (new poetry) in Thamil was actively promoted by the little magazine, *Eluththu* founded by Si. Su. Sellappaa nearly four decades ago and today free verse has come a long way and still much of the good poetry in Thamil is published in the little magazines. The little magazine was also responsible for introducing subjects like existentialism, structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism etc. to the Thamil reader. The way in which many of the subjects are being dealt with may, however, leave much to be desired. But what is significant is that the little magazine has remained the forum for thought provoking discussion and debate.

The 60's and 70's represented a boom time for the little magazine and many magazines like *Kanaiyaali* and *Padihal,* to name just two, flourished and inspired Sri Lankan Thamil writers to venture into little magazines. The Sri Lankan Thamil literary scene was a little different from that in Thamilnaadu and had a larger proportion of quality magazines available at the news stands. The events of 1983 changed all that and serious magazines without institutional support slowly ground to a halt. The spirit of the little magazine was reborn among young writers who sought refuge in Europe, Canada and Australia and between 1989 and 1993 many little magazines such as *Suvadugal* (Norway), *A aa i* (Holland), *Thuundil* (Germany), *Kaalam* (Canada), *Oesai* (France), *Marabu* (Australia) and the feminist *Sakthi* thrived. Today only a handful survive, partly due to the arrival of commercially motivated weekly Thamil newspapers and partly due to the decline in morale among those involved in writing and publishing. Their activity has provoked considerable interest in 'Thamil exile literature' in Tha-milnaadu and a number of the little magazines in Thamilnaadu showed considerable interest in writings by Sri Lankan Thamils in exile.

The monthly, *Subamangalaa,* edited by the late Koemal Suvaaminaathan, which was more of a little magazine in content but a regular periodical in form, showed much interest in Sri Lankan Thamil affairs and before the unfortunate death of Koemal last year concluded a novelette competition for Sri Lankan Thamils in collaboration with *Ilankai Theisiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peiravai.* The magazine ceased publication with the death of Koemal. I have also come across a quarterly, *Ilakku,* very much a one-man effort, which brought out a special number on K. Daniel, the late Sri Lankan Thamil novelist and planning one on K. Kailaasapathi. The magazine *Nirappirihai,* committed to the cause of the *dalit* people organised a conference on Thamils in Exile in parallel with the International Tamil Research Conference held in Madhurai last year which Sri Lankan Thamil scholars were prevented from attending by the Indian government and the Thamilnaadu government.

An interesting transformation occurred late last year in the monthly, *Kanaiyaali,* seen by many to be rather 'Brahminist' in its approach and lacking in sympathy for the Sri Lankan Thamil cause. A change in ownership also led to an improvement in appearance and a radical change in its attitude to socio-political matters. Each of the last few issues carried two or more contributions from Sri Lankan Thamils including those in exile. Another welcome arrival was the relaunched quarterly, *Kaalachchuvadu,* founded by Sunthara Raamasaami, ceased publication a few years ago, and revived in 1995. Like *Subamangalaa* and *Kanaiyaali,* it too provides an open forum for debate on a number of subjects of social and literary interest and carries articles by Sri Lankan Thamil writers. It also seeks to encourage Sri Lankan Thamil writing from outside Thamilnaadu by reproducing in part writings by them in little magazines from abroad.

What is important about little magazines like *Subamangalaa, Kanaiyaali, Ilakku* and *Kaalachchuvadu* is that they have, unlike what many are made to believe, been very readable as well as illuminating. The writers are far more careful about the accuracy of their statements than those in the popular magazines, where, often, sensation prevails over sense. The little magazine, in fact, made an impact on the popular magazines which, now and then, make some pretence to seriousness of content and even led to the publication of imitations of quality journals like, for example, *Puthiya Paarvai.* The news magazine, *India Today* (Thamil edition) too brings out special literary issues twice an year or so, but not on a regular basis. This kind of moral success is also the tragedy of writings of good quality: commercial interests always find ways of deceiving the public. On the other hand, a fear of serious reading is cultivated by people who depend on the ignorance of the public for their survival. There is no denying that there are little magazines that specialise in deliberately obscure styles of writing. But that is not true of many of the better magazines which are more concerned with elevating the standard of readership and reaching out to more people. Since many of the little magazines are not commonly available from news stands that sell Thamil magazines, one depends heavily on private channels and direct subscription to obtain them. It is only by active encouragement of serious reading by the young that the average Thamil readership can be shaken out of its habit of bad reading, especially of magazines that thrive on trivia like the Thamil movie, gossip about personalities, and third-rate fiction lacking in taste and content. ●

(Continued from page 7)

been other politicians in Tamil Nadu like the MDMK leader V.Gopalasamay, PMK leader Dr.Ramadas and the less prominent Nedumaran who while openly expressing sympathetic views towards the LTTE accused Karunanidhi of "betraying the Sri Lankan Tamil cause".

Now that Karunanidhi is back on the Tamil Nadu saddle of power, there is already evidence on the part of many to obtain his support for their respective viewpoints. While expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil groups have begun sending appeals to Karunanidhi, it is learnt that the Sri Lankan government itself is likely to send a high-powered team to explain its devolution proposals and peace efforts.

The reality of the situation however is that the state government of Tamil Nadu cannot act independently without the central government's concurrence on any external matter. However, Karunanidhi is on record as saying recently that he would endeavour to bring about an end to the blood letting in the island by promoting a peaceful negotiated solution to the conflict. ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu parents *(father doctor) seeking professional, attractive, outgoing, confident (22-28) bride for US based son, engineer (M.S., M.B.A.), 29, 5'11", religion, horoscope immaterial. Send details and recent photograph (returnable). M 846 c/o Tamil Times.*

Mother *seeks Christian partner for son, 41, nurse in Austria. Send details. M 847 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu Engineering Lecturer in UK University, *38, seeks fair, sociable, graduate, lady partner, 33 +. Photo please. Strict confidence guaranteed. M 848 c/o Tamil Times.*

North East Tamil Catholic parents *seek qualified Catholic bride, 24-28, for son, 31, professionally well qualified engineer, holding responsible position, USA resident. Send details. M 849 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

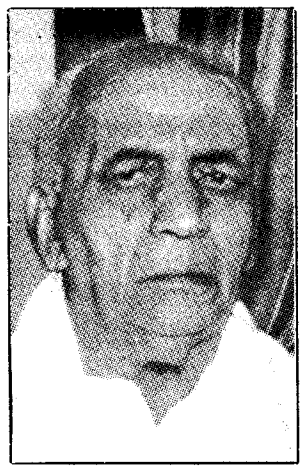
We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Chenduran *son of Mr. & Mrs. S. Wijayanayagam of 90 Mossbrook Crescent, Scarborough, Ontario M1W 2W9, Canada and* **Sri Vidhya** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tony Nagendran of 175 Glen Springs Drive, Scarborough, Ontario M1W 1Y1, Canada at Moghul Banquet Hall, Hood Road, Markham, Ontario on 18th May 1996.*

OBITUARIES

Mr. Nalliah Rasakumaran, *former District Inspector – Telecommunications, Jaffna; son of late Mr. Nalliah and Mrs. Balambikai Nalliah of Kokuvil East, Jaffna; beloved husband of Vasanthakumari; loving father of Mayurathan (Engineering student, Leeds University) and Shanthakumar; son-in-law of the late Mr. Kanagasabai and Mrs. Parasakthy Kanagasabai of Thirunelvaley, Jaffna; brother of Dr. Balakumar (Huddersfield); brother-in-law of Sakunthala Balakumar, Mrs. Chandrakumari Maheswaran (Germany), Mrs. Shanthakumari Rajendram (Teacher, Jaffna), Sivakumaran (France), Mrs. Vijayakumari Mathurayanayagam (France), Mrs. Uththamakumari Srikanthan (Australia), Selvakumaran (Canada) passed away in Huddersfield, UK on 29.3.96 and was cremated on 4th April.*

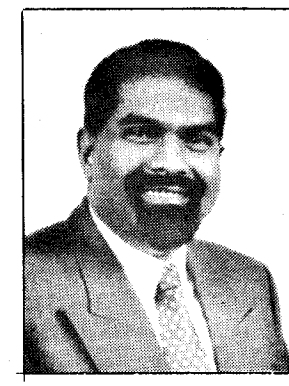
The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted in several ways during the period of great sorrow. – 199 New Hey Road, Oakes, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD3 4GD. Tel: 01484 655025



Mr. Visvalingam Sivasubramaniam *(87) Principal Emeritus, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam; beloved husband of Sironmany; loving father of Dr. Sivanandarajah, late Mrs. Sivagnaneswary Rajasingam, Sivagnanasunderam (Bank of Ceylon, Trincomalee), Ayur. Dr. Sivapalan, Sivathasan (Engineer, Batticaloa), Sivaratnam (Valuer, Jaffna), Sivamanoharan (London), Mrs. Sivaloshanadevi Thavarajah (Teacher, Skanda Varodaya College); father-in-law of Manimehaladevi Sivanandarajah, late Rajasingam, Mrs. Anandhi Sivagnanasunderam (Principal, Ramanathan College, Chunnakam), Mrs. Yogeswary Sivapalan, Mrs. Kamaladevy Sivathasan (Teacher), Mrs. Supathiradevi Sivaratnam, Mrs. Devahi Sivamanoharan and Thavarajah (Surveyor, Saudi Arabia); grandfather of Sutharshan, Priyatharshini, Suseenthiran, Suhanthan, Sutharshika, Suloshan, Suthaharan, Sulakshan, Arooran, Gajamohana, Gajaharan and Vaishna passed away in Chavakechcheri on 26.4.96 and was cremated there. – Sivamanoharan, 2C Milton Road, Acton, London W3 6QA. Tel: 0181 896 1844.*

Mrs. Leelawathy Ilankanathan *(62), endeared as 'Archchi' and 'Kuddy Mami', beloved wife of the late Ilankanathan (Kuddy Mama), Retired Shroff, Hatton National Bank, Nuwara Eliya; daughter of the late Dr. & Mrs. S. Subramaniam of Malaysia (formerly of Thirunelvaley and Uyarapulam, Annaicoddai); daughter-in-law of the late Mudaliyar and Mrs. Saravanamuttu of Sandilipay North, Jaffna; beloved mother of Urmila; mother-in-law of Kuharajah; fondest grandmother of Shobana and Ranjana; sister of Mrs. Saraswathy Sivasithamparam (Canada), Mrs. Pushpawathy Sivagurunathan (Uyarapulam, Annaicoddai), late Kailasam and Dr. Sivapragasam (Virginia, USA); sister-in-law of late Mrs. Swarnamathy Wijayanayagam, Mrs. Ratnamathy Ratnarajah (Colombo), late Sinkainathan and Mrs. Pathma Sinkainathan (Sydney, Australia), late Mrs. Rasapoomathy Patkunanathan and late Patkunanathan, Sivasithamparam (Canada), late Sivagurunathan, Mrs. Sivamuththu Kailasam (Colombo) and Mrs. Nageswary Sivapragasam (Virginia, USA) passed away on 28.4.96 in Peterborough, UK and was cremated on 2nd May.*

All the members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted in several ways during the period of great sorrow. Their special thanks are due to the Saiva Munneta Sangam which readily arranged the funeral rites and the distribution of Sivapuranam. – 58 Ringwood, South Bretton, Peterborough, PE3 9SH, Cambs. Tel: 01733 262760.



Mr. M.A.S. Tisseverasinghe, *(Rajan), Chartered Accountant, dearly beloved husband of Lorraine (Haringey Council), loving father of Jitesh (Imperial College, London) and Shamila; son of Wincie and the late Basil Tisseverasinghe; brother of Wigna, Dilip and Selva; son-in-law of Quintin and the late Merlyn Phillips passed away suddenly on 18.05.96. Funeral 25.05.96 at 11am at New Southgate Cemetery, London N11. – 22 Dorchester Avenue, London N13 5EA. Tel: 0181 884 3767.*

IN MEMORIAM

In everloving memory of **Dr. Parameswaran Kandiah** *on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 12.5.90.*

Remembering you every minute of everyday,
Missing you always as a father, husband and friend.

Your spirit, I still feel, in triumph or disaster,
The memories of you, can only burn for ever in our hearts
And in the face of bereavement, we can rejoice and celebrate
The life and love you shared (Anjali).

Remembered by wife Pathmasany and children Thayalan and Anjali. – 29 Mounston Close, Hartside Grange, Hartlepool TS26 0LR

In loving memory of **Mr. Thambidurai Shanmugarajah,** *Attorney-at-Law, J.P., U.M. Of Kondavil East, Sri Lanka on the second anniversary of his passing away on 5th May 1994.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Ananthavalli; loving daughter Sharmini; son-in-law Ranjit; loving grandchildren Praveen and Anjana and mother-in-law Mrs. Sivapackiam Navaratnam. – 102 Loutitt Street, Yellowknife, N.W.T., Canada X1A 3M5.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

June 1 *Full Moon.*

June 3 & 4 *9.00am to 5.00pm Conference and Exhibition on Kumbakonam, Sacred & Royal City of South India at the British Museum Organised by the Department of Architecture, Cambridge University and the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum. For details Tel: 0171 323 8511.*

June 3 *Feast of St. Charles.*

June 4 *Chathurthi.*

June 5 *Feast of St. Boniface.*

June 11 *Feast of St. Barnabas.*

June 13 *Pirathosam; Feast of St. Anthony.*

June 14 *Feast of Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

June 15 *Ammavasai.*

June 20 *Chathurthi.*

June 21 *Feast of St. John.*

June 21 *7.45pm Violin Recital by Sri L. Subramaniam at Queen Elizabeth Hall RFH 2. Tel: 0171 960 4242.*

June 27 *Ekathasi.*

June 28 *Pirathosam.*

June 30 *Full Moon.*

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171-381 3086/ 4608.

June 8 *5.30pm. Lecture by Dr. John Marr on 'Temples of India's South'. All welcome.*

June 9 *6.00pm Mandolin by Srinivas & Party.*

June 13 *6.00pm Workshop on Karnatic Music.*

June 15 *7.00pm Hindustani Violin by Parur M.S. Gopalakrishnan & Dr. M. Narmada.*

June 16 *6.00pm Karnatic Violin by the same artistes.*

June 29 *7.00pm Veena Concert by Students of Mrs. Sivasakthi Sivanesan.*

June 30 *6.30pm Hindustani Vocal by Vrinda Mundkar.*

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Demonstration in Canberra: *More than 800 Tamils demonstrated outside the Federal Parliament and the Sri Lankan High Commission on 29th April to draw attention to the military offensive conducted by the Sri Lankan government in north Sri Lanka. Demonstrators carried placards with slogans such as 'War without witness', 'Australia save the Tamils', 'We want international mediation', 'We want Tamil Eelam' and shouted the slogans in an emotional manner. Eight Federal Members of Parliament addressed the gathering, and the demonstration outside Parliament House lasted around two hours. From Parliament House they marched to the Sri Lankan Embassy outside which they demonstrated for about two hours at the end of which they carried 'Kodumpavis' of Chandrika, Kadirgamar and Ratwatte and destroyed them. Finally Mr. Ana Pararajasingam made an emotional speech after which the demonstrators dispersed.*

Vishwa Hindu Parishad *is an active organisation in Sydney. Every year it organises a Hindu orientation camp for youth. This year's camp took place for five days from 4th to 8th April and 60 youngsters whose parents had migrated to Australia from several countries including Sri Lanka participated. Everyday the camp started at 6am and continued till 11pm. Brisk warm-up exercises, Yoga and Surya Namaskarams in the early hours of the morning were followed by talks by guest speakers, group discussions, prayers and Bhajan singing, outdoor games and cultural shows. Bush walks, camp fire sessions, Garbha, Bhangra and Indian classical dances were enjoyed by everyone.*

The VHP in India had sent a Hindu Pracharak (non-Sanyasi missionary) Sri Ravi Kumar to organise its activities in Australia. Sri Ravi Kumar, an engineering graduate of the Madras Institute of Technology, speaks several Indian languages including Tamil and has worked since 1975 as a full-time social worker for VHP in India and many South East Asian countries.

Mount Druitt Tamil School: *There are several Tamil schools in the suburbs of Sydney, where classes are conducted with government assistance by volunteers during weekends. There is excellent attendance and participation in these schools, and Mount Druitt Tamil School, one of them, held its annual cultural show on 4th May. The students demonstrated their proficiency in Tamil language through recitation, dramas, dances etc. There was a large audience to encourage and appreciate their efforts.*

CANADIAN NEWS LETTER

Weather: *Spring spoilt by snow and rain!*

Riviresa II Protest: *The World Tamil Movement (Canada Branch) organised a week long demonstration in front of the Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry in Ottawa to protest against the Sri Lankan Government's operation Riviresa II in North Sri Lanka. Several hundreds took part in the daily demonstrations that took place from 25th April to 3rd May. As there are very few Tamils resident in the capital city, Torontians filled the void.*

Suresh Manickavasagar Trial: *The trial over the detention of Suresh Manickavasagar under the Immigration Act, that commenced on 19th March is continuing for the most in camera and at the time of going to press no further information is available.*

The Annual General Meeting of the Senior Tamils' Centre, Ontario *was held on 27th April at the Oriole C.R.C., Don Mills. The following were elected for 96/97.* **President:** *Rosalind Rajanayagam,* **Vice President:** *T. Sivarajah,* **Secretary:** *Mani Pathmarajah,* **Treasurer:** *S. Srijeyanathan,* **Asst. Treasurer:** *S. Thiagarajah,* **Ex-Officio Past President & Board Members:** *S. Tharmalingam, Bavani Sivaramalingam, V. Eeswaranathan, P. Soosaithasan, K. Vigneswaran, J.C. Kumaradas, A.N. Chellapillai, S. Poopalasingam and K. Sittampalam. Over 200 attended the meeting.*

Canadian Tamil Broadcasting Corporation: *The ingenuity of Mr. Kandiah Sivasothy, popularly known as 'Ellaya Bharathy', a former employee of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation has resulted in a 24 hour Tamil broadcasting service, that is a great boon to the Tamils, particularly the home bound housewives and seniors. The radio sets sold by the C.T.B.C. for 100 dollars becomes a life time investment and no monthly fees are payable. The 24 hour service can be accessed by anyone owning this exclusive radio set and living within a radius of 150 miles of Metropolitan Toronto. Canadian, Sri Lankan and World news is beamed regularly to listeners who number over 40,000 now. The service is inter mixed with South Indian film songs, competitions religious programmes etc. This service has become a great educational tool for many including children, and they are most grateful to Elaya Bharathy. The official address of C.T.B.C. is 86 Layard Drive, Toronto, Ontario M4G 3V1. Tel: (416) 429 2374.*

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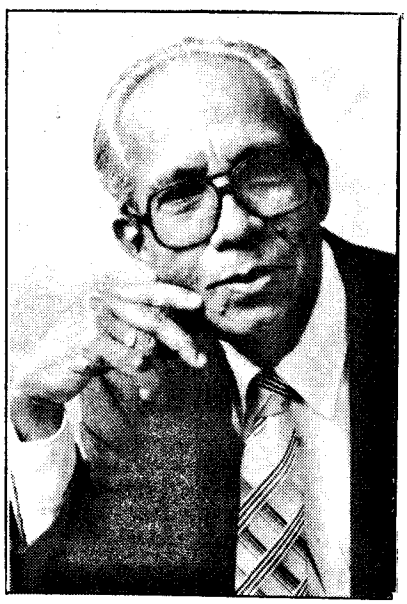

Outstanding Achievement in Poetry

Mr. E. Sangarapillai of 1 – 201 Fountainhead Road, Downsview, Ontario, Canada, writes poetry under the pseudonym 'Godson'. His poem on 'A Beggar Boy' has been adjudged an outstanding achievement in Poetry by The North American National Library of Poetry. His award winning poem appears below.

A Beggar Boy

Half dead and naked beggar boy
In lean and haggard bony frame
Wandering in vain from door to door
Begging a few mouthfuls of food.

I saw him on an evening walk
With melted heart and philosophic mind
I took him home and fed him well
And gave him clothes to dress himself.

I found him job in a friend's farm
That fetched him monthly handsome wage
Soon he proved his acquired skill
With diligent work and loyalty.

Revolting thoughts soon came to mind
About the surrounding cruel world
Posing bitter genuine theory
Why such gap between haves and 'nots'?

Thefts and robbery and terrorism
Are handiwork of grave injustice
Give every youth a just treatment
The world will be a peaceful place.

E.S.P. Godson.

London Tamil Christian Congregation

The London Tamil Christian Congregation now worshipping at the Rivercourt Methodist Church will be moving to worshipping at the Putney Methodist Church in Gwendoline Avenue, London SW15 from 26th May 1996 till the end of the year. The services will as usual be on the fourth Sunday of each month.

Violinist Performs in London

The legendary and Internationally acclaimed Indian Violinist, Sri L. Subramaniam makes a rare visit to London to give a concert of carnatic music on Friday, 21st June 1996 at Queen Elizabeth Hall RFH 2. He will be accompanied by Sri K. Gopinath on Mridangam and Sri G. Yogaraj on Kanjeera. Sri L. Subramaniam, one of the highly respected artistes in Indian music circles is also famous for his numerous East-West collaborations with such Western Classical Music and Jazz legends as Sir Yehudi Menuhin, Stephane Grappelli, Herbie Hancock, Stanley Clark, Joe Sample and Larry Coryell.

He has scored music for many award winning movies such as 'Salaam Bombay', 'Mississippi Masala' and 'Little Buddha'. He has recorded and produced more than one hundred recordings including a five volume 'Anthology of Indian Music' and is the recipient of numerous awards and titles for the huge contribution he has made in the field of music in India and beyond.

Violinist MSG Plays at Bhavan

Violinist M.S. Gopalakrishnan or MSG as he is affectionately known is the greatest Indian violinist who can play both north and south Indian music styles with equal virtuosity. For this appearance in London after 19 years, at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ for Hindustani Violin, he will be accompanied by his daughter Dr. M. Narmada and Shib Shankar Ray on Tabla on 15th June at 7pm. The Carnatic Violin Concert is on Saturday, 16th June at 6pm and S. Balachander will accompany on Mridangam. For further particulars telephone 0171 381 3086.

Muriel V. Hutchins – An Appreciation

Where does one begin with Miss Muriel V. Hutchins? Chronologically, the panorama is ad infinitum. There was no end to the zest, ardour and toil she put into mundane things, to make others contented. Her thinking itself was practical. Nothing in her calculations went by default. She was a woman of fortitude, with a vision and purpose, that far exceeded her thoughts. Deliberate, decisive, determined to go about doing good, like her Lord and Master; paying lip service and obeisance only to Him. In her days, for more than four decades, after she retired from the teaching profession, (like St. Paul who made tents, and not begging for bread whilst he was preaching) she used her pension. She lived in the wilds of Kilinochchi on virgin soil, to make a home, literally and figuratively, for destitute girls and abused women, who had nowhere to go, or none to turn to. Those who were shunned and despised by the elite, had a home in her heart, and the merciful abode or the 'mercy seat' – Karuna Nilayam. These young women were taught not only the basics of agriculture and animal husbandry outside, but also Home Economics inside, not to mention reading and singing on Sundays. We who had read about David Livingstone and Dr. Albert Schweitzer in the wilds of Africa, could not help, but admire the simple life-style of MVH, and the rustic setting of the mode of worship she organised. There was no set time for the service. MVH and her very meagre and modest staff, and a bevy of girls would be seated on mats, singing to the only musical instrument they then had, a 'Lily flute', played by her. All of us waited for the hopper-woman, only a few yards, had finished selling her hoppers. Only then did the worship start. She was so deeply concerned about every soul.

Karuna Nilayam was (and perhaps still is) situated on the western side of Kandy Road, a quarter of a mile or so, south of the Railway Station. 'Hutchins Amma', or 'Mother Hutchins', as she was affectionately called, was also revered by the township. She would go up and down in her 'iron steed', long after people of a younger generation had given up cycling.

Now to her former years, I had seen MVH at various ecumenical functions. I was told that she was an M.A. Oxford, and been teaching at CMS Chundikuli Girls' College and later Principal of CMS Kopay Training College. I was flabbergasted, when she used the correct Tamil word for Atom Bomb – a word which I was only getting to know even in English – the medium of instruction then.

During the time of the Hon. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, she was given meritorious citizenship. She said she was a Tamil. She was that in many ways, although she outwardly appeared different, she never bathed in the open-air, neither at the well nor beaches. She had a bathroom, even though, of the most primitive kind. Her hairstyle, which must have been in vogue

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before WW1, remained the same. Her cotton dress was made in one pattern by her. The style was almost ante-diluvian, but practical. Like Mother Theresa of Calcutta, her wardrobe must have consisted of only three dresses – one to wear, one to wash, and one to mend.

MVH was born two years before the turn of the last century and came to Ceylon, when she was in her mid twenties. She drew her last breath at ninety-eight, just a little while before the turn of the next century on the verge of herself becoming a Centenarian.

Well done! Thou good and faithful servant, Enter into my rest In Memoriam Semper Fideles.

Bertha Swarna Nallanayagam.

New Year & 17th Anniversary Celebrations

The Tamil Association of Brent celebrated the Tamil New Year and its 17th anniversary at the Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley on 20th April 1996. The Mayor of the London Borough of Brent Cllr. Gwen Tookey was the Chief Guest. The event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of lamp by the chairman of the association Mr. V. Kanesanathan.

The first part of the programme was devoted to items from the students of the Brent Tamil School run by the association on Sundays at the Alperton Community Centre. The speeches of the three gold medallists in the elocution contest conducted earlier Ainkaran Sivaji (Juniors – Tamil), Bhavatharani Satchithananthan (Seniors – Tamil) and Dhanushini Thanabalasigam (English); the Bharatha Natyam Recital of the students of Mrs. Anandarani Balendra and the flute recital of Mathisoothanan Satchithananthan were highly appreciated by the audience.

The main attraction of the evening was the children's play, 'Malaikali Ahattiya Moodak Kilavan', the theme of which was that by mere determination one could remove any obstacle. The play was produced by the Tamil Performing Arts Society and directed by Mr. K. Balendra. The effort taken to keep the Tamil language lively among UK born Tamil children is laudable and the play received the well deserved ovation fom the large audience present.

The latter half of the programme was a performance by the Chitralaya Music Group. The association proposes to donate a third of the proceeds to the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation.

Shivananda Old Pupils Organise Cultural Evening

The Past Pupils' Association of Shivananda Vidyalaya (UK) organised a Cultural Evening on 11th May 96 at All Hallows Church Hall, Greenford Middx., which was called Vipulananda Arangu in honour of Swami Vipulananda who was the founder of the Institution. The first item on the programme was songs on Swami Ramakrishna rendered by Mrs. Nivethitha Indrakumar. This was followed by an excellent Veena recital by Nivethitha Thayakaran ably supported by Ranjit Kanagasundaram on the Miruthangam.

The Chief Guest of the evening was Mr. K. Kanapathipillai, a former Principal of the Vidyalaya. His presence at the function and his speech delighted his old students present. Kumari Karthika Sithamparanathan, pupil of Smt Annapoorani Sathiyamoorthy presented items of Bharatha Natyam with elegant abhinaya to songs which aptly brought memories of Eastern Sri Lanka.

Nadar Kavigal (folk songs) from the cultural heritage of the Tamils brought to stage by Vimal Kulanthaivel and Ananthi Kugachandran was appreciated by the audience. The Tamil drama 'Pavama Punniyama' produced by Mr. S. Yogarajah and presented by the Croydon Nadaga Saba was indeed a treat. It kept the audience roaring with laughter from beginning to end.

The final item was 'Paadduku Paadu' which was an impromptu talent contest of chain songs by in-house artistes. The function was a great success in that it was enjoyment for the audience and funds for a worthy cause – The Shivanandah Orphanage – back at home.

Tamil Theatre for Children

It was a remarkable coincidence that our Tamil children born and brought up around London exhibited their histrionic talents, in three different forms at three different venues, during the last week of April. We are talking about (1) the innovative play 'Malaihalai Ahattiya Mooda Kizhavan' by the children of Brent Tamil School, (2) the illustrative play 'Harischandra' by the children of Sai Mandir – Merton Chapter, and the devotional play 'Kaalathi Vedan' by the children of South London Tamil School, Croydon.

The first play written by Prof. Sivasekaram, based on a Chinese folk story, depicted an old man striving hard to transpose a hill, to make way for a straight path. The people of the village see him as an old fool. But he strives to the last, when the Gods appear and bless him. It was a pleasant experience to watch the children speaking spotless Tamil. The outstanding feature of this play is the deft hand of stage decor by Rajah and direction by Balendra, who is an established modern theatre enthusiast and impressario.

Harischandra, is the well known story of King Arichandran, a personification of truth, who refuses to be tricked even by the powerful Rajarishi Visvanmaitra. This theatre version in English, was written for the children of Merton Sai Mandir and directed by Sivanandan. The stage setting and the costumes were superbly conceived and the dialogues were spoken with excellent modulation and true to the character. The obtrusive microphones were absent on the stage and the dialogues were mimicked by the actors to the voices from behind the stage. The scenes depicting the sale of Chandramathi, Arichandran's scene at the crematorium were over bearingly enacted by the little children. Though it was staged by children it had a professional look.

The third play was Kaalathi Vedan, the story of Kannappa Nayanar, the hunter who was venerated as a saint because of his devotion to God. This was presented by the children of South London Tamil School which had the credit of presenting the dramatic version of Ramayanam and earned kudos four years back. In this play the spotless pronunciation and presentation of the Tamil dialogues were spotless and the devotional feeling in the hero as well as the Sivachariar was visibly enacted. Here, the children showed not only their knowledge of Tamil but also their understanding. A rare achievement indeed.

S. Sivapatha Sundaram.

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